 WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	Cabinet: Wednesday 24 March 2021
Report Number	Agenda Item No. 8
Subject	Review of Tourism Service and Visitor Economy
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Councillor Toby Morris, Cabinet Member for Resources Email: Toby.morris@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Philippa Lowe, Business Manager Localities Email: philippa.lowe@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To review the work and impact of the tourism activity carried out by the Council including the Cotswolds Tourism Destination Management Organisation and The Visitor Information Centres and the role they play in supporting the local Visitor Economy
Annexes	Annex A : Complexity Diagram Annex B : Business needs and Support Annex C : Briefing Paper – Visitor Information Services Annex D : Briefing Paper – Tourism Review DMO models Annex E : Action Plan
Recommendations	a) That a joint Advisory Board be established with partners to provide stronger governance over the activities of the Cotswold Destination Management Organisation; b) That the officers supporting the Advisory Board be requested to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Refresh the Destination Management plan; (ii) Develop a range of key performance indicators to monitor impact; (iii) Build on the Action Plan to prepare a programme of work to support the Green Economy, Recovery and Sustainable Tourism; (iv) Prepare a Communication Strategy; and (v) Review the DMO business member levels and funding structure;

	<p>c) That the dedicated face-to-face Visitor Information Services do not re-open and that appropriate budget is directed to businesses to support their transition to digital services; and</p> <p>d) That an annual report be presented to the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet on the state of the Visitor Economy and update on delivery against Corporate Priorities.</p>
Corporate priorities	A Vibrant District Economy
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	Internal consultations with other service leads and external partners and stakeholders

I. BACKGROUND

- I.1. The Council has long recognised the value of Tourism as one of our most valuable service sectors and the vital role it plays in the West Oxfordshire economy. In the UK as a whole nearly two million people are employed and £23 billion pounds spent by visitors.
- I.2. The West Oxfordshire tourism activity is focused on the wider visitor economy and particularly in supporting businesses to make the very best of opportunities associated with this visitor spend. They do this by providing effective management and development of a visitor destination and marketing and promotion of businesses.
- I.3. In terms of the value of the visitor economy for West Oxfordshire, the following data is a snapshot summary of the figures produced in the Economic Impact Assessment (2019) which was published in November 2020. See link below for full report:
<https://www.cotswolds.com/dbimings/West%20Oxfordshire%202019.pdf>
- I.4. It is clear from this data that tourism and the visitor economy plays a major role in the West Oxfordshire economy as a whole.

Total direct visitor spend*: £247 million

- £124m from 3.5m day visits
- £123m* from 548,500 staying visits (£43m from overseas visitors)

Areas of spend*:

- Food & drink - £79m (£10m overseas visitors)
- Retail - £63m (£12m O/S)
- Accommodation - £43m (£12m O/S)
- Attractions & entertainment - £29m (£5m O/S)
- Other - £34m (£4m O/S)

**Note: the vast majority of the spend is from domestic visitors*

Employment:

- 4,400 jobs (3,200 FTE)
- 8% of total employment in West Oxfordshire

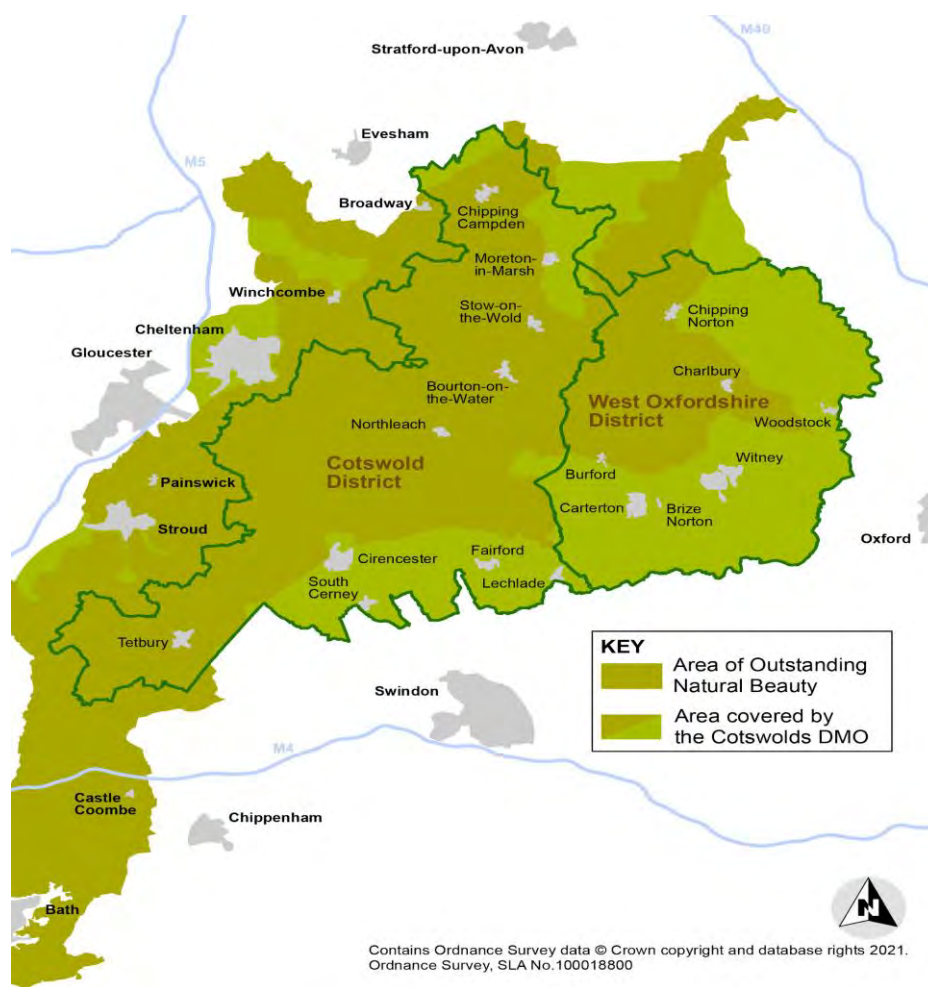
- I.5. The driver for this review of the Tourism Service has been the need to have greater visibility of the work of the Joint Tourism Team and financial support for Tourism by the Council and the need for a clear understanding of the impact of the spend and investment in Tourism services.
- I.6. In order to support the review work and provide appropriate challenge a joint Steering Group was set up comprising Chief Executives for West Oxfordshire and Cotswold District Council, the associated Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Tourism and the Visitor Economy, the Business Manager for Localities and the Joint Tourism Team Manager. Input was also sought from colleagues in Business and Economic Development, Finance and Communication and external partners.
- I.7. It is worth noting that in the recent 2021/2022 Budget Consultation when asked “If we had to cut expenditure” - tourism activity was ranked highest should the Council be forced to make budget cuts. However, in contrast when asked to rank the Council priorities in order of importance, the economy scored highest with healthy towns and villages and climate change coming in second and third. This suggests that impact on the West Oxfordshire economy from tourism is either weak or not well understood.
- I.8. The Council has a corporate priority for a Vibrant Local Economy. However that sector has been particularly harshly impacted by Covid-19 and are likely to be one of the last sectors to fully reopen. The Council has set out its plans for Economic recovery and the

role the Joint Tourism Team can play in supporting businesses in the Visitor Economy through promotion, marketing and targeted training on digitally skills.

- 1.9. The impact of Covid 19 has been severe - in March 2020, the Visitor Economy came to an almost complete halt and subsequently the industry has missed vital parts of the holiday season in 2020 and again in 2021. Accommodation closed to all but a few for key workers and attractions had little opportunity to diversity.
- 1.10. Fears remain regarding potential redundancies when furlough ends and the risk of insolvency is a threat for businesses who have severe cash flow issues. It has been particularly harsh impact on businesses that rely heavily on the business, wedding and events market or on overseas visitors.
- 1.11. The future isn't certain but the impact is clear. In 2019, overseas visitors accounted for spend in West Oxfordshire of £43million. However the Covid pandemic has badly affected overseas visitor numbers. Visit Britain's latest projections for inbound tourism are:
 - 2020: 76% decline in visits, 80% decline in spend on 2019 figures
 - 2021: visits to only reach 29% of 2019 levels, spend to reach 23%
 - 2025: overseas visitor numbers forecast to return to 2019 levels

2. CURRENT SERVICE PROVISION

- 2.1. The council currently provides financial support for Tourism and the Visitor Economy through funding for a number of tourism officers in a shared arrangement with Cotswold District Council and through the provision of Visitor Information Services at Burford and Witney. These activities of the Joint Tourism Team are also channelled through the Cotswolds Destination Management Organisation (DMO) the nationally recommended way to support the sector.
- 2.2. The Cotswolds Tourism Destination Management Organisation is the globally recognised brand name for the strategic Local Authority led DMO and Cotswolds Tourism is in the enviable position of owning the digital space for the Cotswolds with Top Google position for its website, <https://www.cotswolds.com> which has 1.2 million unique visitors. It also has extensive social media following with:
 - Instagram – 52k followers
 - Facebook – 42k
 - Twitter – 25k
 - E-newsletter with 40k subscribers.
- 2.3. Cotswolds Tourism DMO brings together a partnership of over 450 businesses, five local authorities (in addition to Cotswold District Council, Stroud, Tewkesbury and Cheltenham Borough Council) and the Cotswolds National Landscape (formally known as AONB). The DMO has an extended boundary (see map below) which is based on and defined by the natural geography of the area as a visitor economy rather than public sector or electoral boundaries.
- 2.4. The map shows in darker green the boundary of the Cotswolds National Landscape and in lighter green the wider area of **Cotswolds DMO** supported area.



- 2.5. West Oxfordshire forms a significant part of this internationally recognised visitor destination and the vast majority of the business membership (over 70%) is within West Oxfordshire and Cotswold District areas. The DMO is the 'senior' strategic umbrella organisation for management of the Cotswolds visitor destination and the Council sits within that Strategic Partnership. It is the Cotswolds brand as a destination that is recognised by Visitors who are totally blind to the structures and administrative boundaries of an area.
- 2.6. A further value of the DMO, is that like a LEP it is able to directly access national funding for Tourism and the Visitor Economy which is not available to Local Authorities. The Team work closely with national Tourism bodies, Visit Britain and Visit England on nationally funded projects which support businesses, growing resilience and value in the local economy.
- 2.7. The DMO has an adopted Destination Management Plan (2014-2024) sets out details of the role and function of the DMO and provides the Team with focus for their efforts under a number of key priorities which sit under the vision. Link to document: [https://www.cotswolds.com/dbimgs/Destination%20Management%20Plan%20for%20Tourism%20Across%20the%20Cotswolds%20April%202014\(1\).pdf](https://www.cotswolds.com/dbimgs/Destination%20Management%20Plan%20for%20Tourism%20Across%20the%20Cotswolds%20April%202014(1).pdf)
- 2.8. As well as leading the DMO the Team work as part of a much wider and complex Visitor Economy Ecosystem and play a significant, pivotal and high profile role at a district, regional and national level to support the local Visitor Economy. Details are summarised as follows: (see [Annex A](#)).

2.9. In essence the Joint Tourism Team is:

- A shared service and operates on behalf of the Council, Cotswolds Tourism a local Destination Management Organisation (DMO) which covers more than just the administrative boundaries of the Council
- The team operate across two counties, works with two different Local Enterprise Partnerships and across several regional boundaries and associated tourism authorities and organisations such as Tourism South East, the South West Tourism Alliance
- The team works in partnership (as a DMO) with Stroud and Tewkesbury District Council, Cheltenham Borough Council and the Cotswolds National Landscape and works with Parishes and Town Councils to support wider place shaping and a community centred approach
- The team collaborates with other Destination Management Organisations established in Oxfordshire, Cheltenham, Forest of Dean and Wye Valley, Stratford, Bath, Bristol, Worcestershire and Wiltshire and with national tourism organisations – Visit Britain and Visit England from whom they can access grant funding, for the benefit of the local area

3. SERVICE REVIEW ACTIVITY AND COVID RECOVERY WORKSTREAMS

- 3.1. During the review discussions took place with the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) about increasing the input and contributions of the Council and the importance of a closer working relationship. As a result of those discussion new connections have been made with the LEP including sharing of best practice on the Teams work on digital training.
- 3.2. The Council is now represented on the LEP on the Recovery and Investment of the Visitor Economy Group (THRIVE), Oxfordshire's Economic Recovery Plan Task Group and the Culture Visitor Economy sub group and the Visitor Economy working group
- 3.3. The Tourism Team also work closely with Cotswolds National Landscape (formally AONB Board) and are looking to collaborate with them in developing the Green Tourism Strategy.
- 3.4. The Joint Tourism Team led on Covid-19 support for businesses including:
 - Individual contact and 23 Sector led meetings, Free membership to DMO, Guidance and best practice; Messages – 'Know Before You Go'
 - Marketing and Promotion
 - Marketing skills and Networking / Business Communications
 - Signposting to business support / advice / training
 - Particular focus has also been given to digital transformation and the need to ensure the digital offer is front and centre of the design and delivery of business operating models. A recent business survey revealed that businesses identified assistance to improve their digital competence and enabling them to have an on-line bookable service as a key recovery workstream. [Annex B](#) provides a summary of business needs identified by the survey and the outcomes in terms of a programme of on-line digital training.

The following sets out details of some other recent initiatives and projects run by the Joint Tourism Team.

- **DMO Marketing Recovery Fund:** Successful bid for £75k to digitally market businesses that are bookable online on Cotswolds.com website <https://www.cotswolds.com/> (Cotswolds Tourism DMO official website).
- **Uncover the Cotswolds:** £220K project funded by Visit England to develop authentic local experiences and support businesses to get these bookable online via Visit Britain's Tourism Exchange Great Britain (TXGB) platform. This enables businesses to be digitally distributed via other online channels and particularly focuses on experiences available throughout the year and in less visited areas, to help disperse tourists more evening across the wider area and encourage them to extend their stay.
- **Real Cotswolds:** The Team for this project have been working with local Chambers of Trade to boost the recovery of market towns, involving the wider visitor economy, especially retail to give around 20 businesses per locality the opportunity to be featured on a town page. The project was successfully launched Woodstock, whose Town landing page promotes "Visit Woodstock" "Right on the eastern edge of the Cotswolds, just eight miles north west of Oxford, lies the wonderful town of Woodstock". <https://www.cotswolds.com/plan-your-trip/towns-and-villages/woodstock>. This work generated three media articles including a 6 page spread in Readers Digest. Plans are currently being developed for Witney and Burford. The proposed work in Witney to support the Town and local businesses gives an opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues from Business Development and the Councils new Market Towns Officer and to connect businesses to the **Cotswolds brand** as a powerful business proposition.
- **Digital Health Check survey:** was launched to identify specific digital training needs among local visitor economy businesses and the outcome of this will be an online training platform, due to go live by end March 2021. The training will be delivered by two different local providers as a series of short 30 minute on-line sessions and whilst they have been designed in response to feedback from businesses in the Visitor Economy, the training will be accessible to all businesses.

Visitor Information Services

- 3.5. A detailed review paper on the provision of Visitor Information Services (VIC) at attached at [Annex C](#). The review highlights the impact of Covid-19 and rapid move to digital on-line services which support the requirements for pre-arrival booking and pre-planning - 'Know before you Go'. There has also been an associated dramatic reduction in the production of printed publications and guides and default to on line digital versions.
- 3.6. The consequences for traditional VIC face-to-face services is that their business model and much of their offer has been overtaken by events. A number of high profile VIC's such as Bath and Oxford have closed and the provision of information and services for Visitors on arrival at a destination are being delivered by a number of alternative means, largely digitally based.
- 3.7. To aid recovery, a recommendation of the Tourism review is that resources and funding go to where they can make most difference to enable digital business competence in the Visitor Economy and away from face to face support for visitors arriving in the area. On that basis it is further recommended that the dedicated face-to-face Visitor Information services at Burford and Witney do not re-open.

Review of relationship with partner Councils and DMO

- 3.8. The briefing paper ([Annex D](#)) concluded that the hybrid Local Authority Led Model for a DMO was the most agile and flexible approach, ensuring the Joint Tourism Team could adapt to change and also capitalise on opportunities. However, there are recommendations regarding new governance arrangements and setting up a new Advisory Board to:
- Input into and endorse a refreshed version of the Destination Management Plan
 - Review discretionary spend on projects
 - Review planned and delivered programme of work (quarterly)
- 3.9. The Advisory Board will also need to agree a set of Key Performance Indicators, the preparation of an annual update report for Scrutiny and Cabinet, refresh of the Destination Management Plan and preparation of a Green Tourism Strategy.
- 3.10. Furthermore, a Communication strategy is required to ensure that there is transparency and understanding of how the Council is supporting a Vibrant Local Economy and good news stories and best practice need sharing more widely with members and local communities.

Summary

- 3.11. The review has established that the Joint Tourism Team are fulfilling a critical role in coordinating efforts. This includes increasing visitor spend, support for local businesses to raise their profile and access to a global market and enable residents to benefit from the wider economic impact of sustainable growth in the Visitor Economy.
- 3.12. The Team are working effectively and are well recognised and valued by the national Tourism bodies, Visit Britain and Visit England, which is reflected in the funding awards and successful delivery of projects.
- 3.13. The focus of their efforts needs to ensure that their work adds value to the local economy and that through effective governance and communication the Council will clearly be able to see and judge the return on investment.
- 3.14. [Annex E](#) provides a summary of the key activities that the team will be focussing on in the short, medium and longer term.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. Historically this Council has funded the tourism service at a relatively high level both in terms of office based staff and a staff visitor information service in primarily Burford with a smaller provision in Witney and Chipping Norton(terminated when Guildhall contact point closed).
- 4.2. As part of an earlier sharing of the service (pre- launch of Publica) the tourism team was merged between Cotswold and West Oxfordshire and savings shared between the partners. As part of this the teams effectively took on the support of the independent Cotswolds DMO.
- 4.3. The cost to West Oxfordshire to support tourism in staffing costs is in the order of £110,000 which covers a portion of the following posts:-
- Tourism Services Manager – WODC 80% / CDC 20%
 - Tourism & Business Support Manager – WODC 50% / CDC 50%
 - Tourism Development Officer (2 P/T) - WODC 100%
- 4.4. In addition there is a partnership manager providing direct support to the DMO which is supported by Cotswold DC and partnership fee income. No membership fees were charged in 2020/21 given the market conditions.
- 4.5. The team has successfully brought in additional grant income to the partnership as set out below:-

- Discover England Fund (2018/19) £250K grant and (2020/21) £130K grants for business support and getting businesses on line
 - DMO Recovery Marketing Fund 2021/22: £73,500 to support Digital marketing of bookable online experiences.
 - DMO Resilience Fund (to cover the wages of the Tourism Partnership Manager during the first lock down in 2020) – c £10k
- 4.6. Whilst it was clear from the review that the partners support the service at inequitable rates a firm conclusion was not reached on how to resolve this at present as this was due to the original budget inputs upon the formation of Publica. A broader costing exercise is underway across Publica to understand service consumption in all areas rather than merely focusing on a single area which should identify options for budget rebasing when complete. This activity will report later in the year.

Visitor Information Services

- 4.7. VIC provision is largely independent of the tourism joint working with a different model of provision in different council areas. In Cotswold these are largely delivered independently with relatively small grant support. In West Oxfordshire the bulk of the service is delivered through Burford VIC. In total there is an effective level of 3.5 full time equivalent staff costing in the order of £100,000. The cost split in respect of Burford is effectively 80%.
- 4.8. Annual running costs for the Burford building amount to in the order of £11,000. Historically Witney was also supported but this was effectively merged into provision by the customer service team and both demand has been low in respect of tourism support.
- 4.9. The Town Centre Shop is outside the scope of this review as its principal activity supports residents services rather than visitor services.
- 4.10. The review has made recommendations regarding not reopening the Visitor Information Centres (VIC) and recommends that resources should be focused on support for businesses and recovery work rather than face-to-face support for visitors arriving in area.
- 4.11. If members confirm that VICs will not reopen then this will release significant funding for reallocation on digital service provision as set out in 4.7 and 4.8 above.
- 4.12. Prior to finalising the review report for Cabinet, discussions took place with relevant service Managers to engage with HR and staff regarding the implications for staff whose principal role is VIC advisor.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. Should the Council determine that VICs do not reopen then there will be a range of HR decisions that will need support from the legal team.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1. The report raises no specific risks; however the review process will assess any identified risks associated with future delivery models.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 7.1. The work of the Tourism Team supports visitor economy businesses in the District. No recommendations are made in this report which impact on equalities.

8. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. The Tourism Team encourage businesses to be environmentally friendly in their practices and promote the development of green tourism in the District.

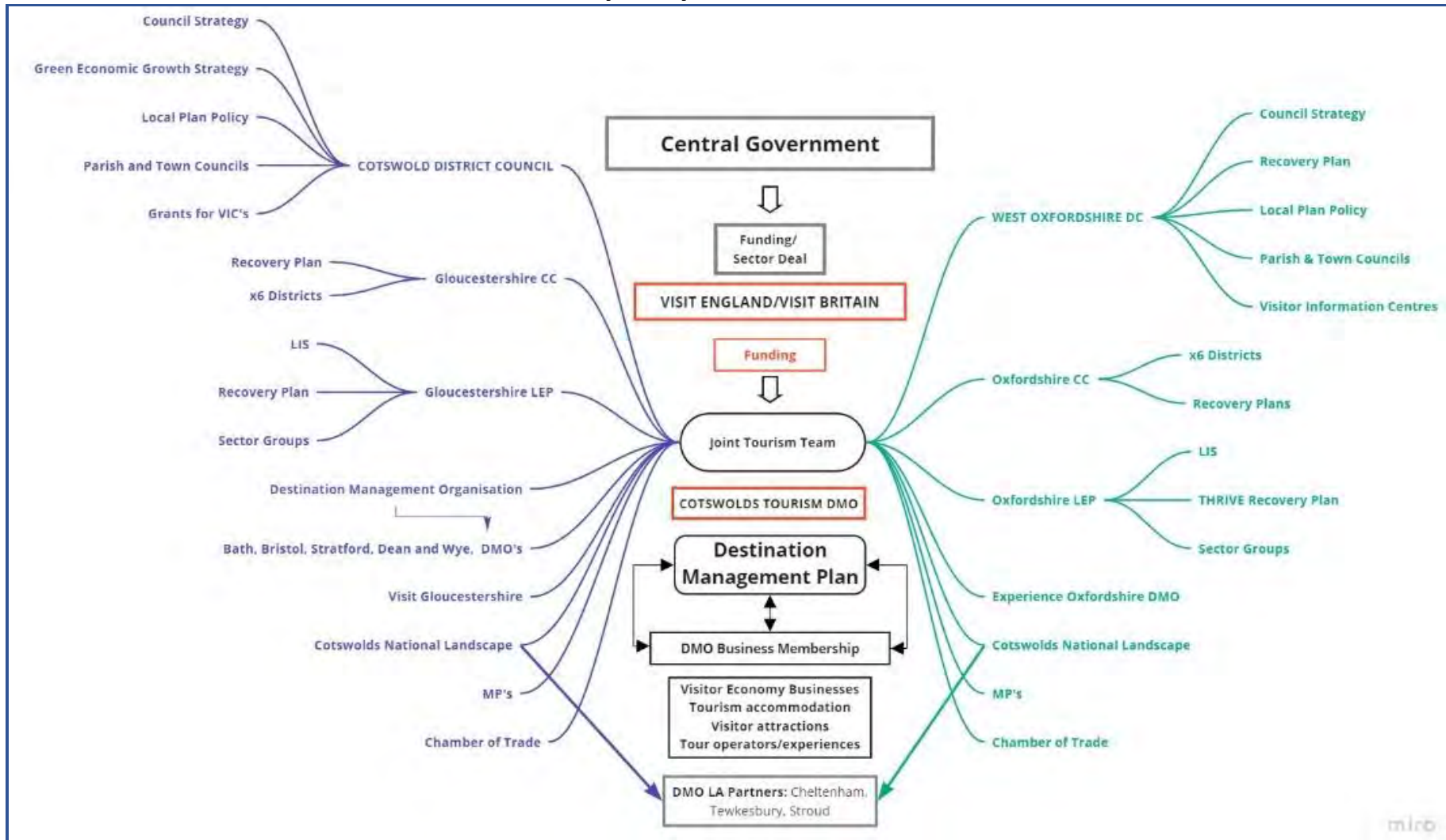
9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 9.1. The review process has explored options for delivery models and made recommendations where changes need to be made.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1. Cabinet reports W Ox Cabinet: Wednesday 21 October 2020

The Visitor Economy Ecosystem in relation to the Joint Tourism Team



BUSINESS NEEDS AND SUPPORT

During the Tourism review a business survey was also sent out with media releases encouraging businesses (non members as well as members of Cotswolds Tourism) to complete: 90 responses were received.

Questions looked to discover: if businesses were members of the Destination Management Organisation; their reasons for being/not being members; the services they valued; how they felt about the support they have received during the pandemic; their key markets; and their future training needs.

Main findings include:

- Top benefits of membership were all digital (inclusion on Cotswolds website and social media channels), closely followed by aspects of business support (networking opportunities and member updates)
- All aspects of support during Covid were rated positively, especially ‘general updates’ (77% rated helpful or very helpful) and updates on regulations (73%)
- When asked “what areas of training or support you feel your business and you would benefit from?” the top five answers (out of 13 options) were all digital:
 - Digital marketing - Social media (70%)
 - Digital marketing - Website training – SEO, content, images (66%)
 - Digital marketing – Maintaining customer contact (61%)
 - Digital marketing - Managing online reputation (52%)
 - Online booking & distribution (50%)
- Other training needs included:
 - Making my business more accessible (48%)
 - Green tourism and sustainability (43%)

The first outcome of the business survey has been the design of a proposed programme of on-line digital training for businesses, due to go live at the end of March 2021.

Training Provider 1:	Training Provider 2:
1. Email marketing 2. Google analytics 3. SEO 4. Social media strategy and content plan 5. Social media hashtags 6. Social media scheduling 7. Social media insights 8. Investing in your website (*subject to agreeing a price) 9. Benefits of blogging (*subject to agreeing a price)	1. Making connections with influencers 2. Increasing overall visibility 3. Images 4. Social media audit 5. Social media basics including how to schedule, great content 6. Sponsored social media ads 7. Social media strategy planning 8. Marketing plans 9. TripAdvisor 10. Websites

VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICES DELIVERY MODELS AND OPTIONS

***“What role do Visitor Information Centres play in supporting the Visitor Economy”
and
“How else can that support be delivered”***

BACKGROUND:

As part of the scoping for the review work the challenge questions set out above were raised with regard to the provision of Visitor Information Services. The following briefing note sets out details of the work undertaken to review this element of support for the Visitor Economy and makes recommendations regarding next steps.

Visitor Information Centres were traditionally the first point of contact for tourists and visitors on arrival at a destination, as a source of information and advice on what to see and do on their visit. However, as will be seen below, a number of contributory factors have now resulted in services being replaced with digital solutions which has directly impacted on VIC's delivery models. Within this wider context it is of note that both the VICs in Oxford and Bath have closed and Bristol has been temporarily closed with no plans to reopen.

National Tourism industry bodies Visit Britain and Visit England historically provided case studies on the many different models for delivery of visitor information services. They recognised the need to consider alternative models to deliver quality information for visitors that is effective, contemporary and economical. There are very many different models but 2 main categories are highlighted for the purposes of this review: Face to Face and Digitally enabled services.

CONTEXT

The changing nature in the access to information and impact of Covid-19 has meant that the operating model for traditional VIC's are being reviewed. Visitor Information service providers are planning for recovery and considering what support is needed to enable businesses to rapidly adapt their business models and also enable visitors to be well prepared and plan before they travel.

Changes in behaviours and access to smartphones have, in recent years fundamentally changed the way in which people access information and services, run businesses and interact with their customers.

Whilst the pandemic has had an absolutely devastating impact on the visitor economy, Covid-19 has catapulted the move to digital on-line services which has enabled and supported the requirements for pre-arrival bookings and the need for visitors to plan ahead. Digital solutions and the use of social media has played a crucial role in supporting the sector and enabling businesses and visitors to connect to their mutual benefit.

The on-going uncertainty regarding Covid -19 and the recent Tier system for restrictions also meant traditional forms of communication and promotion were no longer viable or effective.

Brochures and leaflets about attractions and events became totally redundant with out of date information, failing to capture details of a rapidly changing situation.

In relation to the different variations of the models for delivery of Visitor Information Services can be delivered in-house by tourism teams or customer services, as part of a Destination Management Organisation or contracted out through Service Level Agreements and partnership arrangements.

1. Face to Face - Visitor Information Services

As noted above the traditional model for VIC's was 'face to face' services and this is the current model for Burford VIC and information services at the Witney Town Centre Shop. Even prior to Covid-19 many providers had been exploring alternative delivery models and service improvements to reduce costs, improve income and maximise value for money.

Different business models for face to face services include: relocation to cheaper premises, co-location with other businesses, attractions or service or sub-letting of larger premises to off-set costs.

Examples of other face to face providers locally include:

- The owners of Bicester village who support and run the Visitor Information Centre through provision of premises and expertise with funding from Cherwell District Council.
- Waterstones bookshop have entered into partnerships with VIC's to provide services within their shops.
- In Bourton-on-the-Water visitor information services are run by an independent limited company.

2. Digital Services

Web-based services enable visitors to self-serve relevant content and social media platforms enable access to a rich range of information, insights and details of visitor experiences. It enables content providers to cater for different demographics and a great diversity of needs and through different platforms and content styles.

Businesses have had to rapidly shift their focus to on-line and social media platforms in response to customer needs and demands.

The big advantage during Covid 19 is that instead of a single printed, static version or a brochure of leaflet businesses and content providers marketing destinations, can provide real time information that is accessible 24/7.

As well as information about a destination, things to do and places to visit, stay and eat out, there are also digital Apps, mapping services which all provide a rich range of support for visitors but pre-arrival and post arrival at their destination.

It is likely that digital technologies will play an increasingly important role in supporting the visitor experience including use of 5G to support virtual reality and enhanced reality Apps. The reach of digital platforms can be phenomenal and has proved invaluable during Covid-19 where access to up to date and clear information has been crucial for visitors and businesses.

BURFORD VIC ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE VISITOR ECONOMY

The Burford VIC has been closed since March 2020, in response to the initial Covid-19 lockdown. In order to understand the role played by the VIC information was gathered including a meeting with the VIC team and assessment of comments submitted by members of the local community.

The VIC, when it was open, operated 7 days a week, 9:30 to 5pm Monday to Saturday and 10am to 4pm Sunday and Bank Holidays.

The VIC was run by a Shared Senior VIC Officer (15 hrs a week) and a team of 6 staff members equating to 3.5 FTE, who also support the delivery of Visitor information services at the Town Centre Shop in Witney. These services are wholly funded by West Oxfordshire District Council.

The 19/20 staff costs were £96,466. Additional costs were incurred to pay overtime or a casual staff. There are also running costs for the Burford premises including £7,365 business rates and £3,536 maintenance and utility costs.

There is also an amount of income generated from sales of books, maps, gifts, photocopying and ticket sales of £19,072 at Burford VIC and £12,053 from Witney Town Centre shop.

Support services:

The VIC services include sales, dealing with enquiries, promotion of Cotswolds, events and tours, 'Ambassadors' for Cotswolds Tourism, local information, advertising space, bookings, tickets and change for public toilet and a designated place of safety. In more detail the activities relate to:

- Signposting and recommendations on where to eat and drink
- Highlight villages and attraction on the way to a destination
- Respond to changing weather and need to adapt plans
- Advice on best walks to meet customer needs and abilities

Between the 1st April 2019 and 23rd March 2020 (prior to closure of VIC), the staff booked for 25 Blenheim Palace tickets. In terms of booking visitors accommodation there had been a downward trend in terms of visitors needing the VIC staff to book accommodation as follows:

- 32 in 16/17
- 27 in 17/18
- 19 in 18/19
- 12 in 19/20

In the meeting with the team they also mentioned work they do to support local businesses through:

- Contact B&B to sign up to local charter so that VIC can use them for accommodation booking which provide 10% commission
- Tour Companies provide information about their services
- Chamber of Commerce contact VIC to tell them about local events
- Advertise local events
- Cafes and independents advise about local discounts

The team also connect to the Local Community through:

- The Bridge newsletter – promoting local events
- St John Baptist Church – opening times and events
- Warwick Hall – leaflets on their local events

- Transport Services – bus and train time for local community
- Sharing information about Council Waste Service – accessible site to view council documents
- Burford and District Society – Walking maps

Comments were also received from the local community including the Town Council Mayor, Burford and District Society and The Bridge:

- Tourism is Burford's lifeblood, largest source of income and needs to be actively supported and promoted. The 1,200 residents would only support a community operated shop and a pub.
- Burford destination include wealth of medieval buildings,(including the 10th most visited church in UK), our shops (48), antique stores (3), art galleries (3), pubs, hotels and restaurants (12), and tea rooms (7) as well as Burford Garden Centre and Cotswold Wildlife Park.
- Provides a one stop shop (with human interaction) for 40,000 people annually (other figures say 100,000) and footfall increasing by 5% per annum over the last 3 years and signposts to other businesses
- Most tourists are day trippers, national and international, and come all year round. They total over 1,200,000 annually (other parties say 1.6million), including over 400,000 to Cotswold Wildlife Park and a similar number to Burford Garden Centre. Once it is discovered, many make regular visits to the Town, especially those from Oxfordshire/Birmingham.
- Revenue generated is £50million per annum
- Whilst Burford is known throughout the world as 'The Gateway to the Cotswolds' and the 'jewel in the crown of West Oxfordshire' the vast majority of new visitors arrive without any prepared plans, which is where the VIC plays a major role in helping them to maximise their experience and enjoyment and stay longer.
- Since the closure of the VIC information has not been passed to The Bridge, a community magazine, promoting spending by local residents
- VIC key to decision to twin with Potenza Picena
- Opportunity to reopen Burford Post Office within the VIC and able to support the £6,000 rent
- Opportunity to relocate Tolsey Archive Project – widely dispersed local historical records into one archive location
- Pop up shop run by volunteers selling books, artefacts and other items
- VIC looks sad

ASSESSMENT

Burford VIC delivery model is based on what was the traditional face to face contact with visitors. A face to face service is also provided at the Witney Town Centre shop but this is a much smaller service and is largely focused on signposting visitors and is combined with the provision of wider customer services and support for local residents.

For the purposes of this review greatest attention has been focused on the provision of services in Burford which was a more prominent and high profile service.

Burford, is also a very well established and popular destination for Visitors and supports a wide range of shops and services, including the VIC, which are well beyond the provision normally expected for a town the size of Burford. As noted in the comments from the local community, the Visitor Economy is recognised as bringing benefits and that there is a need for support and publicity of the businesses and destinations.

An assessment of service provision by the VIC at Burford suggested that approximately 20% of Visitors were looking for visitor information, 30% looking for change for the toilet and 50% were to browse gifts. However, there are no absolute records of visitors and their purpose completed at the VIC and therefore is anecdotal. Historically there was a mix of domestic and overseas visitors with European visitors less likely to have booked their accommodation in advance.

Within the context of Covid 19 and requirements for pre-booking, pre-planning your journey and the fact that businesses aren't producing leaflets, the current VIC delivery model has been largely overtaken by events and highlights the need to focus on different delivery models.

<https://www.visitbritain.org/know-before-you-go-get-involved-our-campaign>

Visit Britain are providing support for this digital shift and have been championing a national campaign "Know before you go" to empower consumers to inform themselves before booking a trip. This approach directs the provision of information to pre-arrival as opposed to post-arrival at destination which was the traditional VIC model.

It is also of note that the changes which have taken place during Covid 19 have largely been an acceleration of an existing trend and that it is highly likely that those digital, social media consumer and businesses preferences and requirements will remain as the default.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Visitor Information: Default to Digital

The move away from paper based information has been both for safety reasons and also, as noted above due to the need to constantly update information. Print runs for brochures have been cancelled and digital is now the default means of delivery of visitor information.

By example, the Joint Tourism Team, through Cotswolds Tourism Destination Management Organisation, has harnessed the power of digital solutions, using a combination of Cotswolds.com website, which is top of Google searches and has 1.5 million unique visitors as well as active twitter (24,805 followers), Instagram (50,283 followers), Facebook (40,000) and newsletters with 40,000 readers every fortnight.

Visitor Information is being provided by enhanced digital services and through targeted marketing campaigns. The benefit of this is that it reaches a far wider audience whereas face to face services, in destinations like Burford VIC are limited to foot visitors in that area only. The use of technology such as QR scan codes for tourism and in a post covid error Map dispenser use <https://www.cityscapemaps.com/products-services/dispensers> as a way to provide locality specific information.

Furthermore, direct sale of tickets for local attractions by VIC's was falling prior to Covid as visitors self-served, accessing the convenience of 24/7 on-line services and social media generated content. This trend has accelerated massively during Covid 19 with requirements for businesses to offer on-line bookable services and that trend is unlikely to be reversed, and is still very much needed. The consequences for the VIC's is that an area of work and income generation has now been lost.

Visit Britain/Visit England is supporting this trend and has provided funding to the Joint Tourism Team and Cotswolds Tourism for a project to provide support for businesses to enable them to get an on-line bookable service on a national platform Tourism Exchange Great Britain (TXGB).

Sale of Gifts, maps and books

In relation to gift sales at Burford VIC and Witney TCS it is a reasonable contention that the Council is adding competition on the high street and therefore taking trade from small businesses. Gift sale profits at the TCS were £16,740 for 2018/19 and £12,053 for 2019/20. Given the high level of staff and overheads associated with these buildings these sales are clearly subsidised by local taxpayers.

There are many other potential options available for the sale of gifts, books and maps in Burford and Witney, and that trade is of benefit to local businesses.

Alternative uses to support the high street

It should be noted that the Council, as owner of the Burford VIC Shop, was approached during lockdown with three separate enquiries about renting/buying the Shop from the Council. Property Services estimate that the potential rental income would be in the region of £6,000 per annum. Additionally, the County Council has expressed an interest in offering VIC literature etc in its Library (as is the case in Chipping Norton).

CONCLUSIONS

At the start of this review process lead members expressed their support and commitment to the Visitor Economy and that hasn't changed during the review. Instead a refocus of effort and priorities has had to take place to ensure support for the Visitor Economy responds to the current challenges and enables the sector to play a key role in recovery of the wider economy.

The Council needs to make the very best use of resources to ensure they are directed to where they will make the most difference. This includes looking at new delivery models, building new partnerships and working collaboratively.

To support communities and businesses a number of initial actions are proposed which bring together resources from the Joint Tourism Team and the new Market Towns Officer from Economic Development to support market towns and the visitor economy.

The first steps in this work will involve engaging with Chambers of Trade in Witney and Burford to get a business perspective on the local economy. Insights will be sought on:

- i. Learnings from opening of businesses after the first lockdown and how they can help inform improvements in public realm and preparation for future easing of restrictions
- ii. The value of interventions such as membership of Cotswolds Tourism DMO, Training for businesses, networking events around key businesses, supply chains etc, local campaigns to promote shop local and safe opening
- iii. How best to use digital technologies and social media to connect visitors to businesses, and how technology could be used by local businesses to share their announcements, offers and updates and reasons to visit specific locations
- iv. Engagement will then take place with local Elected Member, Town Mayor and town council to gain further feedback

On the basis of the insights gained, a set out recommendations will be made for further action and interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In terms of the role of VIC's a key finding of this review is that the model for the Visitor Information Services in Burford and Witney, based on a traditional delivery model of face to face contact, does not represent the best way to meet Visitor and business needs. Whilst

historically the VIC's provided a great service for the Visitor in the current circumstances and on-going default to digital, the service's delivery model has been overtaken by events.

The VIC's face to face model is not able to meet the pressing needs for visitors to pre-book and plan, prior to arrival at a destination. Whilst VIC's in the past were able to book accommodation and tickets for local attractions, all that business has now moved on line or is done directly to the business by the Visitor.

Furthermore, the retail sale offer of the VIC's, whilst complementary to their information services, is not justification for running a shop at Taxpayers expense when the sale of books, guides and gifts is not a core function of a Local Authority. It is also a service which can be offered by other businesses, thus continuing to meet customer demands.

The impact of Covid-19 and changes in the way Visitors access services and information means that the VIC's service offer and income generating streams have fundamentally changed and as a business model they are no longer viable.

It is on the basis of these set of circumstances that a recommendation is made that the VIC service does not re-open.

NEXT STEPS

1. Prior to finalising the review report and Cabinet meeting, a discussion needs to take place with relevant service Managers to engage with HR and staff regarding the implications for staff whose principal role is VIC advisor.

Additional recommendations:

2. That resources from Joint Tourism Team and Economic Development - Market Towns Officer work with Local Chamber of Trade and local communities, as noted in conclusions above, to find out about business needs for on-line bookable services and what locality 'arrival' information is required and how that could be delivered
3. That resources from Joint Tourism Team with expertise in digital communication, work to support businesses build on-line content to support visitors to Burford and Witney in particular
4. That a new resource is approved to provide dedicated support for on-line solutions which support local businesses and visitors to the area

BRIEFING NOTE FOR TOURISM REVIEW STEERING GROUP**DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANISATIONS
DELIVERY MODELS AND OPTIONS****Challenge questions**

“What are Destination Management Organisations (DMO's)?”

“What is the model, work priorities and impact of Cotswolds Tourism DMO?”

“Has the Council and Cotswolds Tourism DMO got a strong clear voice with the LEP?”

“What is the right DMO model for the future? - Identify what is fit for purpose?”

“What governance and monitoring is required of Cotswolds Tourism DMO?”

BACKGROUND

As part of the scoping for the review work the challenge questions set out above were raised with regarding gaining an understanding of the role and function of Destination Management Organisations (DMO's).

The reason for raising this query was that in order to carry out a review of the Joint Tourism Team and understand their work and priorities, it is necessary to understand '**Cotswolds Tourism**', which is a Local Authority led DMO. This internationally recognised brand brings together over 450 business members, 5 local authorities and the Cotswolds National Landscape (formally known as Cotswolds AONB). West Oxfordshire and Cotswold District Council are lead funding authority with Stroud, Tewkesbury and Cheltenham Borough Council as partner members.

The following paper brings together examples of DMO's, provides details of the priorities and impact of the Joint Tourism Team (under the umbrella of Cotswolds Tourism) and sets out the measures of success for a fit for purpose delivery model for the future. It focuses on the operating model and how it supports the visitor economy, it does not address the funding split between the two lead authorities which is subject to separate consideration.

The paper finishes with a set of recommendations of actions to support the operation of a successful DMO and vibrant local visitor economy. Feedback is sought from the Steering Group regarding the outcomes of the review and proposed recommendations.

CONTEXT

In 2019, the Government published the Tourism Sector deal setting out the Government's future vision for the British tourism sector. In launching the Deal, Business Secretary Greg Clark said: “Tourism is one of our most valuable industries and it plays a vital role in our economy, with nearly two million people employed in the communities across the country and £23 billion pounds spent by visitors in the UK last year”.

The Government recognises the Visitor Economy, within which Tourism sits, as vital in supporting local economies and thriving places. Prior to 2020, Tourism was one of the largest and best performing sectors of the UK economy, generating £155,4bn and was forecast to be worth over £257 billion by 2025.

The impact of the pandemic has further highlighted the importance of the sector which is seen as being uniquely placed to support the government's levelling up agenda of sharing the benefits of growth. To support that end, the Government is currently developing a Tourism Recovery Plan.

Qu1. "WHAT ARE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANISATIONS"? Role and functions

To make the very best of the opportunities associated with the spend in the visitor economy, Destination Management Organisations, (DMO's) as local tourism organisations, meet the need identified by Central Government for strong, independent, effective management and development of visitor destinations.

As visitors to a 'destination' will be blind to administrative boundaries or areas of responsibility, DMO's need to work collaboratively with public bodies and local organisations to provide a holistic approach to the strategic leadership of a defined genuine visitor destination. The areas covered by DMO's therefore reflects the natural geography of an area's visitor economy rather than local public sector or electoral boundaries.

DMO's have a critical role in coordinating efforts through implementation of an agreed strategy as set out in an approved Destination Management Plan.

The benefits of co-operation are also unusually important for the visitor economy compared to many other sectors due to:

- Very high proportion of small and medium sized enterprises
- Large number of different destinations of varying sizes, types of attractions, local political leadership, transport links etc.

Co-operation enables promotion of a shared visitor destination rather than just individual attraction, restaurant or hotels.

The value placed on the work of DMO's was acknowledged early into the pandemic when in April 2020 Tourism Minister Nigel Huddleston launched £1.3m fund to support Destination Management Organisations (DMO's), stating that "This funding will ensure that DMO's can continue to provide critical business support and start to prepare for recovery".

DMO's and the Sector are also represented and supported at a national level by two tourism agencies, Visit Britain (VB) and Visit England (VE), who act as the key relationship and interface at a local level with the network of Destination Management Organisations. VB/VE provide direct financial support through access to funding for the sector; however, this is only available to DMO's and not Local Authorities or Local Enterprise Partnerships.

VB/VE are currently engaging closely with the Government in the development of a Tourism Recovery Plan as part of their statutory duty to advise Government on tourism policy. As part of the preparation of the Recovery Plan the Department Culture, Media and Sport has announced their intention to carry out a DMO review in Spring 2021, though details for the review have not yet been announced.

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANISATIONS – Delivery and funding models

As noted above, the Governments view is that England needs DMO's to manage and develop different destinations effectively, but doesn't prescribe a particular model.

DMO's therefore are atypical organisations, the choice of the most appropriate model for a particular destination being influenced by local priorities and issues that need to be addressed in the local Visitor Economy. Across the Country, each DMO develops their own working arrangements

The Visit Britain site identifies DMO s in Gloucestershire as:

- Cotswolds Tourism
- Destination Bristol
- Forest of Dean and Wye Valley Tourism Association
- Marketing Cheltenham
- Marketing Gloucester

The Visit Britain site identifies **DMO** s in Oxfordshire as:

- Cotswolds Tourism
- Experience Oxfordshire
- Tourism South East

The characteristics of a successful DMO can be defined as:

- Strategic leadership - A clear destination management Plan or Tourism Strategy and secure funding. Visit England suggest this is ideally from a combination of commercial income and local authority grants
- Branding - A defined geographical area which recognises visitor boundary and combines smaller destinations where relevant
- Strong support from and for local businesses
- Balances the needs of members and visitors
- Strong partnership and collaboration with local and national decision makers - (LA's, LEP, Visit Britain and Visit England)
- Understanding of domestic and international visitors and where the DMO fits into the national regional picture

TYPES OF DESTINATION MANAGEMENT MODEL

The chosen DMO model, for a particular destination, will take on board the critical success factors noted above and the functions of the DMO will reflect, promote and manage the identified priorities in the agreed Destination Management Plan.

Broadly, there are three types of DMO models: Private Sector Led company models; Private and Public Sector Partnerships or Local Authority Led models. Each may or may not have public sector / local authority funding. Annex I provides a summary of each type of DMO model against the costs, funding partners, monitoring and governance and SWOT/risks.

Qu2 “WHAT IS THE MODEL, WORK PRIORITIES & IMPACT OF COTSWOLDS TOURISM DMO?”

As noted at the start of this paper the Joint Tourism Team lead and run **Cotswolds Tourism** DMO partnership. The DMO is a hybrid model. It is Local Authority led with core funding coming principally from West Oxfordshire District Council and also Cotswold District Council.

Cotswolds Tourism DMO hybrid model also enables operating as a **membership organisation**, which as noted at the start of the paper includes over 450 business members

providing an operating budget which funds a Tourism Partnership Manager and support activities for the business members.

Furthermore, this hybrid model enables the Team to provide support to businesses who are not members of the DMO, something private commercial models don't allow.

The DMO has a visitor 'destination' boundary which covers the Cotswold National Landscape (AONB boundary) as well as all of West Oxfordshire and Cotswold District Council area. The vast majority of the business membership is within West Oxfordshire and Cotswolds district areas.

Cotswolds Tourism is the umbrella organisation which provides strategic leadership, support and visibility for the destination but it operates with financial support and buy-in from the local authority partnership leads. The DMO's adopted Destination Management Plan (2014 – 2024) is a critical document setting out an agreed set of objectives which represents the interests and commitment from both public and private sectors.

The agreed vision for tourism in the Cotswolds DMO area is:

“To ensure that the Cotswolds is a vibrant year round destination where visitors enjoy high quality, authentic experiences and tourism makes an increasing contribution to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the local economy”.

The agreed priorities of the Cotswolds DMO are:

- *Partnership – Shaping the Approach Together*
- *Product – Enhancing the Visitor experience*
- *Marketing – developing the Cotswolds Brand and its core values*
- *Knowledge – Establishing a thriving tourism industry*
- *Performance – building excellence through networking and collaboration*

A Partnership Agreement for the DMO strategic partnership was also drafted in 2017 but is not signed but the partnership is currently managed by an officer team of representatives from each local authority and the Cotswolds National Landscape.

The Agreement states that the priorities of Cotswolds Tourism DMO partnership are:

- To promote the Cotswolds area as a destination of choice for domestic and international visitors.
- To work with local businesses to promote their goods and services as an integral part of the local tourism offer, and enhance business understanding of the importance of the visitor economy.
- To highlight tourism issues to elected Members and to parish and town councils.
- To influence national, regional and local strategies that impact on tourism and the visitor economy.
- To identify common themes and issues relevant to the Partnership, explore solutions and agree joint actions where appropriate.
- To promote the Partnership and secure resources to ensure its continuation and development.
- To agree spending on campaigns, publications, or additional staffing in line with the Partnership's priorities.
- To jointly commission research to inform the Partnership's activities.

- To feed information upwards to regional and national tourism bodies to ensure that the Cotswolds is recognised and promoted as a destination in national and international campaigns.

Cotswolds Tourism DMO work by the Joint Tourism Team includes visitor management, product development and controlled marketing which aims to influence visitor behaviour to extend the season, to encourage visitors to less visited areas and to try to encourage active tourism rather than passive sightseeing.

The Team work with local communities to help manage the pressure on ‘honeypot’ locations from over-tourism promoting a broader range of destinations and experiences in order to spread the economic benefits of the visitor economy more widely and minimise the adverse impacts.

Unlike other commercial tourism marketing organisations, commercial DMO or other tourism teams, it’s not just about promotion. The Joint Tourism Team adopts a holistic, place based approach, which maximises the benefits of the visitor economy, whilst recognising the need to address the pressures of too much focus on one tourism destination, a green economy and of course sustainable development and climate change. This means that they not only work with tourism operators, destinations and accommodation, they also work with the High Streets to secure a better visitor experience

Other areas of work for the Team include Press & PR - image requests, organising farm trips, attending press events, follow up of events and content creation. Film & TV requests for information provision. Attendance at travel trade shows including IMM and VIBE events. The creation and publication of town and virtual guides.

The hybrid model therefore enables the joint Tourism Team to fulfil a much wider remit including working with a large number of towns, dealing with town councils and business trade bodies. This has included work on specific events such as Tour of Britain or Cotswold Hare Trail or more recently on efforts to boost the high street, and recovery from the effects of Covid 19.

This hybrid model has proved resilient, thanks to the on-going commitment and financial support of the lead Councils for the local economy. This has enabled the DMO to provide critical support for businesses within the sector that has been devastated by the impact of Covid-19.

Key activities during Covid-19 to support businesses:

- Stakeholder engagement
 - Free membership and individual contact ; 23 Sector led meetings
 - Guidance and best practice; Messages – ‘know before you go’
 - Support to move online and to digital
- Marketing and Promotion
 - Marketing skills and Networking / Business Communications
 - Signposting to business support / advice / training
- Reopening of town centres
- Pilot Project for Local Tour Operators and Accommodation Providers
 - ‘Experiences’ with local business – domestic packages

- Woodstock Project. First of the projects across two authorities: Witney, Burford, Cirencester, Tetbury and Northleach to follow.
- Targeting Overseas residents – particularly in London
- Local ‘staycation market
- Digital Connectivity: business survey, digital health check and planned training

A further value of the DMO partnership, rather than just a Tourism team within a Local Authority, is that the DMO can access external funding which is not available directly to the Council. The team have been highly successfully in recent funding bids some of which is detailed below.

Key areas of work, including externally funded projects:

- Discovery England Fund – ‘Uncover the Cotswolds’ (£250k 3 year funding - just secured £90k to extend to 5 year funding)
- DMO Resilience Scheme – enabling DMOs to support their businesses (approx £17k)
- DMO Recovery Marketing Fund – deliver local marketing activities aligned to national campaign (£73,500 funding)
- Business Advice Hub – support finder, latest guidance (online website promoted by team)
- Recovery Webinar – research and insights, guidance and marketing (showcases work to support local tourism businesses to get on-line bookable service through TXGB)
- Where Good to Go’ – Scheme to demonstrate businesses adhering to public health guidance (Visit England run system extended to June 2021. Team promotes businesses to sign up)
- Business Engagement
 - Networking and Local Connexion (business interaction)
 - Consumer newsletter (every 2-4 weeks) to 38,500
 - Attract new members
 - Support existing membership
- Training – co-ordinate, best practice, case studies
- Special Projects – Pub Hubs / Women’s Tour of Britain

Membership has grown significantly from 260 in 2017 to over 450 in 2021. Business engagement and involvement has increased dramatically. Businesses have benefited from the strength of the DMO digital marketing, with membership giving businesses listings on Cotswolds.com, the DMO’s official website which acts as a marketplace, showcasing the area and its businesses.

The marketing reach is significant with the Cotswolds brand as follows:

- Unique visitors to **Cotswolds.com**:
 - From 751,864 to 1.2 million (60% growth)
- Facebook followers:
 - From 5,286 to 42k (694% growth)
- Twitter followers:
 - From 15,150 to 25k (65% growth)
- Instagram followers:
 - 2,100 to 52k (2376% growth)

The impact of the Joint Tourism Team's work is significant and far ranging. They have, as noted above an enviable high profile website and strong social media presence which enables them to connect visitors with local businesses, attractions and events.

Support for businesses

The work of the Team demonstrates a real concern for businesses rather than a commercial interest. The strengths of Cotswolds Tourism DMO, which has been built by the Team are of high value to businesses in that it enables them to have access to:

- A globally recognised brand and high profile and accessible website – top ranked on Google with 1.2 million unique visitors a year
- A channel to press and pr at a national and international level
- Active social media channels including over 100,000 followers and high engagement rates
- Strong links/channels of communication to national tourism bodies and access to funding
- Industry advice, targeted training and support

The Team has been proactive in providing support for businesses during Covid-19 pandemic and has grown its membership over the past year. A recent business survey has informed the planned programme of work and support including a need for training associated with digital services and a desire to learn more about green tourism.

ASSESSMENT Sections

Qu 3“HAS THE COUNCIL AND COTSWOLDS TOURISM DMO GOT A STRONG CLEAR VOICE WITH THE LEP?”

Whilst the work of the Joint Tourism Team with local businesses and projects with local communities has made a positive impact and is addressing key issues which have been identified, the messaging about the work wasn't getting back to the Council or shared more widely. The concerns around visibility and sharing success stories were picked up as part of the review paper on Communication which was presented to the Steering Group at the last meeting.

A paper had also been presented to the Steering Group on the relationship with the LEP as again it was considered that more could be done to present a strong clear narrative on the work which was being undertaken to support businesses in the local visitor economy.

Recommendations from that paper highlighted the new working relationship and participation on LEP groups by the Business Manager for Localities and Joint Tourism Manager and the contribution towards recovery plans. This approach needs to be developed further to ensure that the Council clearly articulates its position. This could be further enhanced by undertaking a review of the DMO Destination Management Plan (DMP) and involvement of the LEP and other key stakeholders in co-creating and agreeing a new DMP.

Qu4 “WHAT IS THE RIGHT DMO MODEL FOR THE FUTURE? - WHAT IS FIT FOR PURPOSE?”

The work on Horizon Scanning as set out in the associated Briefing paper for the Steering Group, identifies areas of challenge and the on-going uncertainty for the visitor economy. Whilst Boris Johnson has now announced the roadmap for reopening the economy there is a need for a flexible and adaptable model of delivery for the DMO which can respond to issues as they arise.

The review of the different DMO models does flag risks around wholly private sector/business models which are commercially rather than politically driven. The priorities of these DMO's could result in conflict between the strategic objectives of the Council (managing the impact of tourism, environment impacts) with the commercial objectives of the business members.

This has arisen during Covid-19 when a number of DMO's have ceased operating. This does not suggest that they are a model that remains fit for purpose. Furthermore, DMO's which focus on overseas markets or city breaks or business led DMO's which rely heavily on ticket sales or membership fees are closing, reducing activities and facing redundancy. Fundamentally, commercial operations are also more susceptible to economic shocks and loss of private sector funding.

The other key issue of concern for the Council, which has emerged during the review work, is that commercial DMO's don't work with businesses or organisations unless they are members. Feedback from the Steering Group is the desire to enable a wider level of support for business and the communities most impacted by visitors to the area.

Contrary to the potential risks of a commercial model, the existing Cotswolds Tourism DMO does enable influence and involvement of the Council in setting the priorities of the Destination Management Plan. It also ensures that the Corporate Priorities and actions agreed in the Recovery Plans can be delivered by the Joint Tourism Team, collaborating with colleagues working in Economic and Business Development to support a vibrant local economy.

Cotswolds Tourism DMO focus on the domestic visitor market has also placed them in a better position to respond to the challenges of Covid. They also have a breadth of public sector partners focussing on recovery, are able to co-ordinate resources to support the visitor economy and places beyond honeypots.

QU5 "WHAT GOVERNANCE AND MONITORING IS REQUIRED OF COTSWOLDS TOURISM DMO?"

In answering this final challenge question, a paper was produced for the Steering group which set out recommended approach to the Governance of the DMO. This included setting up an Advisory Board to be led by the lead Portfolio Holders for West Oxfordshire and Cotswold District Council with the primary functions of endorsing the DMO's Management Plan, reviewing discretionary spend on projects, quarterly review of planned and delivered work and input into the Destination Management Plan refresh.

CONCLUSIONS

The review work has highlighted the strong support from Central Government for Tourism, Visitor Economy and the work of DMO's in optimising the value and contribution of the sector to a vibrant local economy.

The review work has identified how Cotswolds Tourism DMO and the Joint Tourism Team meets list of characteristics of a successful DMO including: Strategic leadership, Branding, Strong support from and for local businesses, Balances the needs of members and visitors, Strong partnership and collaboration and Understanding of domestic and international visitors.

In the current economic climate, the hybrid model of Cotswolds Tourism DMO is fit for purpose. The Team and DMO are extremely effective in supporting businesses in the sector and have potential to grow that offer for the benefit of businesses in the wider local economy. The DMO's successfully social media following and customer base is a huge asset for local

businesses. The team have also accessed funding to support digital health checks and training and are working with towns to grow visibility of their offer and businesses.

However, the DMO and Team are only able to do the work they do through the commitment and support of the Council and on-going access to external funding from Visit Britain/Visit England.

The Teams work in enabling delivery of the Council priorities and agreed actions to support the Council's plans for recovery, should continue to work with businesses to support marketing and digitally enabled solutions; develop the relationship with the LEP and engage with communities on place shaping and management of visitors.

When the economic climate is more stable and the future of the visitor economy is clearer, the recommendations are that work is undertaken to explore the options around the balance of private/public sector funding. The current focus however is on recovery.

The review did however identify a number of areas where change is needed or particular areas of work needs to be prioritised and these are set out in the recommendations below.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Implement the agreed governance arrangements to support delivery of DMO Management Plan
- Develop an agreed set of Key Performance indicators including:
 - Gross Value Added
 - Wider public recognition of role of visitor economy in recovery from Covid and added value
- Prepare and present an annual report on the state of the visitor economy and contribution by the Team and DMO to a vibrant local economy
- Work with key stakeholders and businesses in the visitor economy to carry out the refresh of the Destination Management Plan to ensure that the focus of work remains appropriately prioritised
- Provide a clear narrative which explains the Council's role as are part of a Strategic Partnership and highlights the return on investment for the Council and local tax payers
- Continue to build connections with wider business ecosystem to maximise spend from visitors, including plans for High Street recovery
- Enable training and support for businesses to be digitally enabled and provide a high quality customer experience including building confidence and value in employment in the sector as a career and not a job
- Support businesses to make a transition to zero carbon and enable green and sustainable business models
- Grow DMO membership and enable local businesses to understand and access the significant value of the Cotswold Tourism brand
- Build collaborative and partnership relationships on place shaping and management of visitors in order to maximise the benefits of visitor spend and minimise the impact
- Continue to access opportunities for funding to support existing and future projects
- Works and connects with the LEP on the delivery of Local Industrial Strategy and recovery plans.
- Highlight the opportunities and qualities of the area as a place for businesses in the wider economy to invest.

ANNEX I: DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANISATIONS

PRIVATE SECTOR LED MODEL

The first type of model can be a Limited Company, Community Interest Company or not for profit (with or without local authority funding), partnership model, Business Improvement District (funded by levy on local businesses).

The key purpose of this model is marketing and co-ordinating the promotion of the area as a leisure, conference, business, and educational visitor destination. This can include operating a Visitor Information Centre (VIC's), operating a membership schemes, providing accommodation-booking services, marketing the area to leisure, business and overseas travellers, PR activity, developing destination websites and organising events.

Costs

In a fully commercial DMO, operating costs are covered by commercial funding streams. This could include income from membership fees, patrons, sponsorship from larger local companies, profits from events, retail sales (usually including a VIC), walking tours, providing marketing consultancy for other DMOs/LA/LEP, website income or other advertising revenue streams. The necessary income to support a private sector DMO is not insignificant.

Funding Partners

Funding partners for a private sector model can include sponsorships, patrons, membership funding models that provide a commercial income stream ensure that local businesses have a stake in the success of the DMO and hold it accountable. Conversely, as a commercial company, without contributing to the funding stream, the strategic interests of the local authority are not secured. Any local authority priorities would be commissioned from the DMO at cost. However, a local authority can be a contributing partner or as in the case of Visit Bath, a shareholder.

Monitoring and Governance

A commercial company would be answerable to its board of directors which can include a local authority member. A company would produce annual accounts and hold an Annual meeting with its shareholders.

SWOT / Risks

- They are commercially rather than politically driven.
- DMO has strong private sector led business agenda which would normally include the breadth and experience to operate a commercial business.
- As a commercial interest, the DMO can become vulnerable to economic crises and indeed during the Covid pandemic at least one of this type of DMO has ceased to exist due to the lack of incoming funds (Visit Cambridge and Beyond) and others are looking at contingencies to continue operating.
- The model excludes non-members even if they are a key product in the area.
- A BID company would only address the specific area rather than a wider local visitor economy.

- As a commercial interest, members could demand immediate returns and not necessarily take a long-term strategic view, spend excessive time chasing financial contributions and only deliver what businesses will pay for.
- The model, relies upon maximising the potential of sales in tourism and visitor economy and seeking a financial return rather than managing tourism in a way that takes on board the economic and social impacts of additional visitors to a locality.

PRIVATE / PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP MODEL

This is a hybrid model that includes a partnership of both private sector and public sector (normally local authority) interest. It can be part of the LEP or part of the local authority (with or without additional commercial funding) but has a degree of arm's length and independent operation. (Example includes Cambridge and Beyond which has just ceased trading). The remit of the DMO can be wide, not simply including a contractor of services. It is different to the public sector model in that it would choose the investment priorities and opportunities for intervention.

Costs

There is an opportunity for public sector funds to leverage private sector investment. Private sector partners will expect a return on the investment and will need to ensure that the priorities and interventions are aligned.

Public sector will be expected to bring secure funding which may conflict with annual budget planning.

Funding Partners

Public sector funding is still required, however, opportunities for alternative funding should be pursued.

As with funding partners for the partnership model there are opportunities to lever in private sector funding and commitment from tourism businesses. This can include sponsorships, patrons, membership funding models that provide a commercial income stream ensure that local businesses and the local authorities have a stake in the success of the DMO and hold it accountable. As a partnership, the strategic interests of the local authority are better secured by the election of local authority members on the board.

Monitoring and Governance

This can include an operation similar to a company with a board of directors with the local authority members sitting as board directors.

SWOT – Risks

- This model can be seen as an independent operation with buy in from both public and private sectors. It needs a strong and defined management plan with key objectives that represents the interests and buy in from both public and private sectors. As a

partnership with businesses there may be conflicts between the strategic objectives of the local authority (managing the impact of tourism, environmental impacts) with the commercial objectives of the business members.

- As a commercial operation, it will be impacted by economic shocks and this has been the case during the current pandemic.
- Stronger opportunity to lever in additional private sector funding and commitment from tourism businesses

Note: In April 2020, the Government announced financial support to DMO's who usually received 50% of their income from commercial sources recognising that they were at severe risk of closure due to the pandemic. This was to ensure that they were able to continue to operate.

PUBLIC SECTOR MODEL

The public sector model can be a destination management function within a lead local authority. Alternatively, the responsibilities can be transferred to a local authority controlled company.

A public sector led approach reflects the need* for local authority leadership in destination development, management of infrastructure and place based marketing which reflects the objectives of the local authority including economic development, planning, wellbeing, transport, culture. It facilitates an integrated approach.

** This model supports the need for local leadership and a shared vision and commitment to place shaping for an area. This is particularly important where there is a risk of over-tourism and the management of the pressures and tensions associated with honey-pot locations.*

Costs

The Local authority led funding models have provided a relatively secure funding model and are been able to take a longer term, strategic view, provided an incentive for other local partners to work together. Being part of a wider organisation, it also has reduced overheads. The DMO need to remain mindful of business needs and security of sufficient funding can change dependent upon individual Local Authority resources. As a DMO it is also able to access other funding streams including Discover England Fund and most recently Resilience Funding and Emergency Funding.

Funding Partners

The funding relies entirely upon each Local Authority (LA) partner committing funding to tourism as a priority product and one where it is important for the authority to make an intervention.

In response to Covid – 19 and the need to support recovery in the visitor economy, Local Authorities are reviewing their priorities and funding commitments to ensure resources are focused to where they can make most difference.

In a local authority controlled company prominent businesses, academic and tourism figures can sit alongside members of the local authority, typically with a Board chaired by LA representative.

Monitoring and Governance

The governance can be a simple Terms of Reference or the full considerations of a Company in the case of a local authority controlled company and a Board of Directors including people representing the visitor economy sector in the locality.

The DMO must ensure that it retains the support and participation of the private sector visitor economy businesses. It is therefore important that it retains a business sector profile which is recognised by partners as a business facing organisations rather than a local authority profile. However, it is also important to engage businesses more directly in the decision making processes and this can be successfully completed by input into the preparation and review of Destination Management Plans, which are then adopted or approved by the partner Local Authority.

SWOT – Risks

- The determining factor is the strength of political support and ability to translate that into financial support.
- A local authority controlled company model gives reassurance to the industry that there are business rather than politically led decisions and that there is commercial expertise at the heart of the company whilst the public sector can be assured that its strategic aims are aligned with its political ambitions.

JOINT TOURISM TEAM – ACTION PLAN

Short term recovery and immediate actions in response to Covid:

- **Digital marketing:** with businesses having been closed for so much of the last year and struggling to survive financially the tourism team need, as soon as restrictions are lifted, to prioritise domestic marketing. Digital marketing allows the team to determine markets and messages but with the flexibility to change these at short notice and DMO Recovery Marketing Fund money has been secured to assist with this.
- **Over tourism:** the easing of restrictions after the first lock down saw a few places receiving more visitors than they had the capacity to absorb comfortably, which caused some tensions. It is anticipated that this will again be a feature of this summer and, while acknowledging the limits of the joint tourism team's influence over day visitor numbers, the team need to agree actions to try and mitigate the effects.
- **Messaging:** in order to ensure a safe re-opening of the visitor economy, the tourism service needs to emphasise to visitors the importance of maintaining social distancing and respect for local residents and the areas they visit. The messaging should also emphasise and promote other, less visited, areas that might offer a better visitor experience at peak times.

Short to medium term:

- **Support business resilience:** as part of the Uncover the Cotswolds project the tourism team are identifying the digital training needs of the local businesses and sourcing training to help them improve their online presence and to become bookable online.
- **Build local supply chains:** through networking events and information provision to local businesses the tourism team will foster cooperation between businesses and help them link into local supply chains.
- **Training and development:** working with relevant partners the tourism team will support local businesses to ensure that their staff can access suitable training in order to counter potential recruitment problems caused by Brexit, to maximise opportunities for locals particularly young people and to ensure their staff offer the best customer service possible
- **Development of experiences:** in order to encourage overnight stays and to enrich the visitor experience the tourism team will continue to work with local businesses, especially in less visited areas, to develop engaging experiences that are available all year and that can be marketed online.
- **Repurposing businesses:** some businesses were previously heavily reliant on markets that are unlikely to recover for some time to come. With overseas visitor numbers currently projected to return to 2019 levels only in 2024 or 2025 and with some areas of the visitor economy (for example business meetings and weddings) unlikely to recover any time soon, hospitality businesses previously reliant on these markets need support and advice to repurpose, as much as possible, their operations and target markets.
- **Support for the retail sector:** a high proportion of visitor spend goes to local retailers. The tourism team will continue to work, via their Real Cotswolds project and with colleagues in Business Support, to maximise the benefits of visitor spend in the wider local economy and to support retail in the market towns.

- **Sustainable tourism:** the shared tourism service, working with Climate Action colleagues and external partners, to encourage local businesses to improve the sustainability of their operations and to encourage visitors to minimise the impacts of their own behaviour while visiting. The team will need to consider visitor payback schemes like the additional parking charge in Bourton that will be used for local initiatives and the Cotswolds National Landscape's 'Caring for the Cotswolds scheme.
- **Local plan policies:** the tourism team needs to develop better communication channels with planning colleagues to ensure better input on planning applications, influence upon Local Plan reviews to highlight the need for any particular policies to provide strategic support to the visitor economy.

Longer term:

Digital and technological advances: in the longer term the joint tourism team need to keep abreast of digital and technological advances that are being made. Advances that may shortly have a significant effect on the running or marketing of local visitor economy businesses include the use of voice searches (like Siri and Alexa), virtual and augmented reality, recognition technologies, personalisation, conversational commerce (like WhatsApp) and the use of chatbots and AI, especially in customer service and information provision.

Provision of information by digital means will be prioritised and there will be a continued need for digital training for businesses and help to improve their digital presence and keep abreast of changes.