

Meeting of stakeholders for Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Visitor Economy - 3 December 2004

Managing the Visitor Economy of Coventry, Solihull & Warwickshire

Report of the Coventry & Warwickshire Tourism Officers Group

Summary

The Advantage West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy published in April 2004 proposes the creation of strong sub-regional Destination Management Partnerships to manage tourism. These partnerships are intended to integrate the interests of public infrastructure provision and the private sector tourism providers in development of the visitor economy. This paper reports progress to achieving this aim for the sub region and proposes the establishment of a forum for the development and coordination of tourism development and strategy across the sub-region.

Recommendation

That the Forum members:-

- 1) Encourage their authorities to commit to closer collaboration on the development of the visitor economy in the sub-region.
- 2) Subject to agreement with the principal organisations supporting the development of the visitor economy in the sub region, to create a visitor economy forum under the auspices of the Coventry, Solihull & Warwickshire Partnership.
- 3) Agree with the invited representatives the membership of the forum
- 4) Agree in principle the objectives of the forum set out in this report

Introduction

1. At its meeting of 16 April 2004 the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Sub-Regional Forum agreed to take forward a forum for the visitor economy in the sub-region. Progress has been made and as a result representatives of some of the principal agencies operating in the sub region in support of the visitor economy have been invited to attend the meeting to agree how best sub regional cooperation can be taken forward and how a forum could operate. Discussions have taken place between officers and this report has been agreed by, and incorporates comments from, officers from all five Warwickshire district councils, Warwickshire County Council, Coventry City Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, and also with CVOne and South Warwickshire Tourism.

DMPs – the key agencies for delivering tourism development

2. The context under which the tourism industry operates has now changed (see Appendix 1) and the new Advantage West Midlands' strategy for the visitor economy is built around the concept of there being Destination Management Partnerships (DMPs) in every sub region. Such partnerships are not just about the marketing of destinations. It is intended they should lead change and nurture pride in the destination, ensure delivery of a quality visitor experience and also make it easier for visitors to buy and spend more. In essence, while they will be responsible for marketing, DMPs should also ensure that the infrastructure such as roads, toilets and car parks combine with attractions to provide an excellent all-round visitor experience.
3. AWM has indicated that in the future its funding will be directed through these sub-regional partnerships. There is, however, no pre-defined model or set timescale for their creation. To a large extent it will be up to Sub-regions to develop a DMP structure that works for them. Heart of England Tourism (which is leading the development of DMPs for AWM) estimates that a viable Destination Management Partnership would have a turnover of at least £1million per annum.
4. Within Coventry and Warwickshire it is acknowledged that we have two primary candidates in CVOne and South Warwickshire Tourism (SWT) to form the basis for DMPs in this sub-region. However in other parts of the sub-region where the tourist industry and its support infrastructure is less well developed there is no body able to step immediately into this role.
5. The draft Visitor Economy Strategy for Coventry & Warwickshire commits the partners to ensuring that all parts of the county are covered by a Destination Management Partnership. The aim of this report is to propose a way forward for the entire sub-region which builds on the existing framework, brings value to the partners and satisfies the AWM aspiration of creating sub regional DMP structures.

Roles for the public sector

6. The Visitor Economy Strategy recognises that the contribution that the public sector makes to the visitor economy is fundamental. Local authorities are guardians of many of the places people visit and a visitor's perceptions of a place is often governed by their experience of things that local authorities are responsible for – e.g., public toilets or parking and signposting. They are responsible for developing the visitor economy through public realm management, ensuring "quality of place", visitor management and signage as well as supporting tourism activities, promotion and marketing. These functions are controlled by different divisions and, sometimes, different tiers of local authorities and there is scope for better coordination for those involved and this spreads well beyond tourism or economic development officers. For instance,

many tourism management matters coincide with town centre management responsibilities.

Working together for the benefit of the sub region: Options for the Coventry, Solihull & Warwickshire sub-region

7. Engagement between the public and private sectors is crucial. This is a building block for the DMPs already established in parts of the sub region but it is recognised that the approach, sub regionally, is fragmented. All partners recognise the need to work together to provide a stronger voice for the tourism industry to raise the profile of the visitor economy and its importance to the economy as a whole. Closer working on core issues such as skills and infrastructure is also seen as necessary to identify needs and to influence relevant policies and organisations and national and regional level.
8. It is therefore proposed to establish a Visitor Economy Forum under the auspices of Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnerships Ltd, the economic development partnership for the sub-region. CSWP already has a number of fora on issues such as transport, rural matters and the high technology corridor. These fora develop policies on relevant issues and influence other organisations at national, regional and local level. Importantly, CSWP membership encompasses the private sector as well as the public sector.
9. Establishing a Visitor Economy Forum in this way would complement the existing organisations' roles in tourism promotion and management and add value to their work where common causes exist. It would allow those areas not currently covered by CVOne or South Warwickshire Tourism further time to determine how they might create a new DMP for their area or buy in services from existing partnerships.
10. Commitment to this forum would also indicate to Advantage West Midlands the sub-region's commitment to joint working and engagement with its strategy. This is important to accessing funding in the medium term.
11. The forum's objectives would be:
 - To raise the profile of the important contribution made to the economy by the visitor economy and to steer coordination and joint working between those involved
 - support and stimulate development of visitor economy sector businesses in the sub-region by ensuring that the complete visitor experience is of the highest quality
 - To address the common infrastructure factors impacting on the sector which are not addressed in the marketplace.
12. It would achieve these by:
 - Overseeing delivery of the sub-regional visitor economy strategy
 - Setting up working groups on issues such as skills, research, transport and acting on their recommendations
 - Engaging with other CSWP fora to promote tourism interests
 - Delivering joint projects where relevant via working groups

- Influencing national, regional and local policies to take account of tourism development matters.
13. Membership of the visitor economy forum could include:
 - Learning & Skills Council
 - Local authorities
 - Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber/Business Link
 - CVOne
 - South Warwickshire Tourism
 - CSWP – to consult with members and propose a chair
 - Tourism Associations – 1 rep per assoc
 - Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support
 - Local Strategic Partnership
 - Town Centre Managers – 1 rep
 14. Resources for the forum are important to its success. Warwickshire County Council is able to provide staff time to establish the forum with support from CSWP. At this stage it is not anticipated that partners will be required to provide funding for the forum. Occasionally, agreed joint activities such as commissioning research may require funding from the partners' existing tourism budgets. The arrangements should be reviewed after the first year of operation.
 15. The forum must also be accountable to its sponsors. A report of the forum's activities is to be made to the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership and the local authorities forum on an annual basis.

Next steps

16. Receive the endorsement of members of the sub-regional forum for the establishment of the Visitor Economy Forum.
17. Warwickshire County Council to work with CSWP to establish the forum in consultation with partners.
18. Partners in the Visitor Economy Forum to agree an action plan.

Appendix 1

Context for change in visitor economy support structures

- a. In the West Midlands the visitor spend is some £4.8m per year (2001). More specifically, £562m was spent in Warwickshire and £435m in Coventry & Solihull. In 2001 there were over 17,100 tourism jobs in Warwickshire. Stratford on Avon district has the highest reliance on tourism-related employment. The sector is therefore an important part of the sub-region's economy.
- b. The West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy envisages that Destination Management Partnerships will:

- Reduce duplication of public expenditure, clarify marketing messages and promote to attractions and providers the importance of quality and pride of place
 - Reflect a partnership of local authorities with the private sector to manage and market a small family of brands
 - Be membership organisations
 - Communicate and interlock with other sub-regional/local authority functions such as planning and inward investment
 - Need to work closely with regeneration and town/city centre management companies – in some instances to combine
 - May run Tourist Information Centres/ Destination Management Systems/accommodation and attraction guides/co-ordinate festivals and events
 - Connect with each other and with the regional support structure
 - Forge and develop active links with Regeneration Zones, where appropriate, to ensure better integration and priority of investment activity
 - Work across regional and county boundaries in partnerships.
- c. Within the sub-region two destination marketing organisations exist. CVOne promotes Coventry and parts of Warwickshire as a conference and leisure tourism venue, whilst also having responsibility for city centre management (street cleaning, car parks etc). CVOne is the closest to AWM's concept of Destination Management Partnerships in the region. Its turnover is around £8.5m, core funding is from the City Council.
- d. South Warwickshire Tourism (SWT) is a private company and membership organisation established by the private sector in partnership with Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon district councils to market their tourist destinations. SWT also provides visitor services through its Tourist Information Centres and contact centre. The organisation's board has recently agreed to accept members from the Cotswolds which it sees as being a complementary destination. South Warwickshire Tourism currently has a turnover around £1.2m p.a.. core funding is from the district councils.
- e. In the other parts of the sub-region, tourism development is led by local authority tourism officers. Rugby businesses are included in a well established tourism association and a fledging association exists in Northern Warwickshire (for both NWBC and N&BBC). In Solihull, home of both the National Exhibition Centre and Birmingham International Airport, the focus is on business tourism. A business tourism officer has recently been appointed to the Economic Development team while leisure tourism is mainly targeted towards the local market. Most businesses are members of Marketing Birmingham which is part funded by Birmingham City Council.
- f. A tourism officers group for Coventry & Warwickshire has been meeting for several years and has jointly commissioned Locum Destination Consulting to draft a visitor economy strategy for Coventry & Warwickshire. Since the matter was last discussed at this forum a new officer has been appointed at Solihull and having recognised common interests it is hoped that Solihull will join with partners in Coventry & Warwickshire to deliver appropriate projects jointly.

- g. Discussions have taken place with stakeholders over recent months on how the sub-region can relate to the AWM framework. The sub-region's position differs to that of other parts of the region in that there are already two quasi DMPs operating. These do not however cover the whole sub-region. Both CVOne and South Warwickshire Tourism are successful in the roles they fill and there is no impetus for major change from their memberships nor their sponsoring local authorities.
- h. One option would be for the three remaining Warwickshire boroughs to join either CVOne or South Warwickshire Tourism. Concerns about loss of local identity have meant that this route has not been followed.
- i. A more federal structure has also been debated where CVOne and South Warwickshire Tourism would continue to market and manage their destinations, but a sub-regional body would be established to co-ordinate activities and applications for funding to AWM. However, one of the key stakeholders expressed an objection to this method of joint working.

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Background Papers

AWM Visitor Economy Strategy, April 2004

Draft Coventry & Warwickshire Visitor Economy Strategy