



CHESTERFIELD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Community, Customer and
Organisational Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny Project Group
report on the
Visitor Economy Strategy

Date agreed by CC&O Scrutiny Committee:

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Project group members:

Councillors:	
Lead	Kate Caulfield
Group Members	Howard Borrell Stuart Brittain Ian Callan Barry Dyke Ed Fordham Shirley Niblock
Project group officer support was provided by Brian Offiler and Rachel Appleyard	

1.0 Introduction and reasons for the review

- 1.1 The development of a visitor economy strategy and action plan would create a vision for the beneficial and sustainable growth of the town as a destination and establish priorities for marketing, investment, product development and training.
- 1.2 The Service Director – Economic Growth and the Cabinet Member for Town Centres and Visitor Economy attended the Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee (CC&O) in September, 2020 to provide information on the current position of the Chesterfield visitor economy and shared plans to develop a visitor economy strategy and action plan.
- 1.3 At the meeting, the committee agreed to establish a scrutiny project group (SPG) to contribute to the preparation of the strategy and action plan and report progress back to the committee. Involvement of the SPG would contribute to the development of the strategy, providing a wider member and community perspective.

2.0 Link to priorities and review aims

- 2.1 The development of a visitor economy strategy and action plan was a key activity for delivery during 2021/22 under the Council Plan 2019-2023 priority “Making Chesterfield a thriving borough”.
- 2.2 The aim for the scrutiny review was to contribute to the preparation of the visitor economy strategy and action plan through constructive ‘critical friend’ participation at each of the key stages. Scrutiny involvement would benefit the strategy development by strengthening the quantitative and qualitative

methods and evidence base and achieve a deliverable action plan that supports the Council Plan priority of 'making Chesterfield a thriving borough.'

3.0 **Review approach and findings**

3.1 The approach to the scrutiny review followed the timeline for the visitor economy strategy development. In September 2020, the CC&O Scrutiny Committee received an update on the current state of the visitor economy in Chesterfield along with initial plans for the visitor economy strategy and action plan. This information set the context for the start of the scrutiny review.



3.2 The review was then carried out using a variety of different methods including informal meetings, meetings with key officers and consultants and written responses and evidence. The different stages of the review are detailed below.

3.3 The first meeting of the SPG took place on 8 December 2020 where members discussed and agreed, in consultation with the key officers, the scope for the scrutiny review. The project group then considered the findings from the visitor economy audit along with the draft consultants brief which formed part of the invitation to tender documentation. The council had decided to appoint consultants to prepare a new visitor economy strategy and action plan that will guide the development of Chesterfield's visitor economy over the next 5 years (2021-26). Suggestions and comments from the SPG were taken on board by the officers and the group contributed ideas for who to include in the wider consultation on the development of the strategy.

3.4 The [project start report](#), which set out the scope for the review including the aims and objectives and proposed work schedule, was approved by the CC&O Scrutiny Committee on 25 March, 2021.

3.5 Once the consultants, Team Tourism, were appointed, members invited the consultants along with CBC officers to attend a SPG meeting on 31 March, 2021. Team Tourism shared the aims of the visitor economy strategy and action plan with the SPG along with the timelines for the development of the strategy. The SPG were invited to share ideas based on three core discussion points which Team Tourism would then use to inform their evidence report and options paper; these were:

- 3.5.1 **Strengths – what are our strengths and what do we have that will motivate people to visit (and stay in) Chesterfield?** The SPG considered these to be the existing Market and Artisan Market, history of the town (Roman, Medieval), attractiveness of the town centre core, friendliness and welcoming nature of the people, proximity to the Peak District and other cities, surrounding attractions (e.g. Bolsover Castle, Staveley Hall), Peak Resort development, football club and art exhibitions at the college.



- 3.5.2 **Challenges – what are we not good at, what are we missing, and what do we need to improve?** The SPG suggested that the challenges included how to combat internet shopping and how to increase the spend of visitors to support local businesses. The SPG considered there was a need to improve the self-promotion and marketing via various channels, ability to attract independent shops and traders, availability of exhibition space, interpretation information, tours, signposting and greenery.

- 3.5.3 **Opportunities – where are our opportunities and what can we develop to attract more visitors?** The SPG suggested several opportunities including increasing the residential offer in the town centre, developing the early evening economy, building on existing successful events, nearby developments at Peak Resort and The Glass Yard and the Staveley Town Deal.

- 3.6 The next stage of the review involved a meeting of the SPG to discuss the visitor economy situation report and agree a written response on behalf of the SPG. The situation report summarised the position of the current visitor economy of Chesterfield and detailed the evidence base used to inform the report's findings. The SPG provided a written response to the consultants, CBC officers and Cabinet Member which included general comments on the core focus areas for the strategy as well as more detailed comments on the different components which comprise and/or support the visitor economy.

- 3.7 The SPG's written response to the situation report is summarised below, the full response is attached at Appendix 1:

- 3.7.1 The most productive group to target is day visitors, along with day visitors in the Peak District and the coach/travel trade.

- 3.7.2 Propose threading the story of Chesterfield through the eventual strategy to address the gaps in heritage and culture by helping to theme the proposals and support the development of the town centre daytime offer.
- 3.7.3 Endorse the creation of a timed action plan to enable the strategy to be monitored, supporting the delivery of the vision.
- 3.7.4 Use a two-stage approach when planning events by expanding the current offer to include evenings and weekends as well as weekdays when residents who work during the weekdays miss out.
- 3.7.5 Maximise the opportunities from existing successful events, such as the Artisan Market and Records Fair, by extending their run times to support the early evening economy.

- 3.7.6 Using the buildings already in Chesterfield to capitalise on arts and culture e.g. using vacant units in the Pavements shopping centre for art installations or museum exhibits.



- 3.7.7 Support the inclusion that more budget hotels are needed but also propose that further clarity is needed over self-catering accommodation i.e. Airbnb.
- 3.7.8 Agreed that the current mixture of marketing resources needs addressing as it creates a confusing image for visitors. Suggest seeking clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the different organisations and agreeing a single marketing image to improve access to information for visitors.
- 3.7.9 Support the idea of a "Town centre interpretation scheme" to aid visitors navigating the town centre. In addition, consider the marketing information given to coaches in advance to prepare visitors for arrival.
- 3.7.10 Acknowledge the challenges to transport connectivity due to historic nature of the town and suggest that, whenever possible, improvements to connectivity are considered e.g. the station masterplan will have a benefit to connectivity to the town centre.
- 3.7.11 Maximise the use of partners in supporting the vision and moving the mentality away from the Council being expected to deliver the strategy on its own.

3.7.12 How to encourage residents to champion and challenge negative perceptions.

3.7.13 Awareness of the need for funding to support the delivery of the action plan and that a clear vision is essential to securing funding.

3.8 Following the submission of the response, the next steps for the SPG were to be consultees on the draft visitor economy strategy. The draft strategy was approved by Cabinet for public consultation on 2 November, 2021; the report and appendices are available [by clicking here](#).

3.9 Team Tourism, the Cabinet Member and key officers met with the SPG on 8 November, 2021 to deliver a presentation on the strategy including the process that had been taken to develop the documentation, the three aims of the strategy and the seven strategic priorities. At this time, other key stakeholders were also being consulted on the strategy as well as a full public consultation which was available on the Council's website.

3.10 This meeting provided the SPG members with an opportunity to ask questions on the strategy ahead of putting together their written response. This included important discussions such as the review of HS2 by the government and the impact this may have on the strategy as well as the recent encouraging announcements about the government's levelling up fund. The SPG also sought information on the possibilities and limitations when considering working more closely with external organisations such as PEAK Resort, universities and colleges.

3.11 The SPG reconvened on 22 November, 2021 to agree a written response using the structure of the public consultation and provided comments on the core proposition followed by each of the seven priorities. The written response is summarised below, the full response is attached at Appendix 2:

3.11.1 **Core proposition: 'A lively market town with the iconic Crooked Spire Church, Chesterfield inspires day and staying visitors with its unique mix of independents, markets, events, festivals and borough-wide attractions, providing a great base from which to explore Derbyshire and the Peak District'**. The SPG recommended some minor changes to the wording to incorporate the idea of the story of Chesterfield and move the emphasis onto Chesterfield as the main destination rather than a leaping off point.

3.11.2 **Priority 1: Creating great places that people enjoy spending time in.** The SPG suggested amending to “...people enjoy staying and spending time in” to reflect the ambition of increasing the dwell time of visitors.

3.11.3 **Priority 2: Developing the Crooked Spire experience.** The SPG welcomed the strengthened focus on the heritage stories that were incorporated into the strategy and proposed adding “Chesterfield’s historic story” into this priority to maximise the opportunities of the proposed visitor experience centred around the Church which was also on the location of the original Roman fort.

3.11.4 **Priority 3: Maximising the visitor potential of the PEAK Resort development.** The SPG fully supported this priority and made a suggestion around working directly with PEAK Resort on technology and connectivity.

3.11.5 **Priority 4: Developing a year-round programme of speciality and festival markets and events.** The SPG suggested a small amendment to the wording to make the distinction between speciality markets and festivals as well as recognising the existing events which can be further developed.



3.11.6 **Priority 5: Enhancing Chesterfield’s cultural and heritage offer.** The SPG proposed adding “Enhancing and sharing” to recognise the existing cultural and heritage offer.

3.11.7 **Priority 6: Securing new hotel provision in Chesterfield.** The SPG suggested altering the wording to “accommodation provision” to broaden the scope of the variety of accommodation on offer.

3.11.8 **Priority 7: A ‘Chesterfield Inspired’ marketing approach.** The SPG were particularly encouraged to see this as an aim as one of their primary concerns had been around the split marketing resources across different organisations. They felt this priority was key to the rest of the strategy as visitors need to know about Chesterfield and what is happening in Chesterfield in order to be encouraged to visit.

3.11.9 The final comment of the SPG was to suggest an eighth priority focusing on the importance of safety and inclusivity and building on the effective relationships with the police. Their proposed wording was “Continue to offer a town that is entertaining, fun, safe and inclusive.”

- 3.12 The written response was submitted to the key officers and Cabinet Member for consideration along with the responses from other stakeholders and the public.

4.0 **Review conclusions**

- 4.1 The aims of the scrutiny review were to contribute to the development of the strategy through constructive 'critical friend' participation at each of the key stages, providing a wider member and community perspective, and contribute to the preparation of a deliverable action plan that supports the Council Plan priority of 'making Chesterfield a thriving borough.'
- 4.2 The SPG have been involved at each of the key stages of the review and extend their thanks to the officers from the economic growth team, Team Tourism and the Cabinet Member for attending meetings and providing information. The review has benefited from having a clear work schedule and cooperation from all those involved which has enabled constructive 'critical friend' participation at the crucial stages of the strategy development.
- 4.3 It is evident in the final draft strategy that the comments of the SPG have been taken into account, particularly through the inclusion of a priority to create a 'Chesterfield Inspired' marketing approach and maximising the history and assets that the town already has.
- 4.4 Following on from this review, the SPG have determined that their aims have been achieved and request that their final report be taken into account as part of the approval of the strategy and monitoring of the action plan.

5.0 **Recommendations**

- 5.1 The SPG has provided comments and recommendations throughout the strategy development process which have been taken on board by Team Tourism, CBC officers and the Cabinet Member. The SPG therefore has two final recommendations:
- 5.1.1 That the findings of the scrutiny project group be considered by Cabinet alongside consideration of the visitor economy strategy and action plan.
- 5.1.2 That, subject to the approval of the strategy and action plan by full council on 23 February, 2022, an update on the delivery of the action plan be reported to the CC&O Scrutiny Committee after the strategy has been in place for X months (12 months?) to allow scrutiny to review the progress made.

Contacts:

Project Group Lead – Councillor Kate Caulfield

Officer supporting the group – Rachel Appleyard

Appendices:

Appendix 1: SPG written response to visitor economy situation report.

Appendix 2: SPG written response to consultation on draft visitor economy strategy.

Appendix 1: SPG written response to visitor economy situation report.

Consultation response from the Scrutiny Project Group

General comments:

The project group largely agree that the focus should be on day visitors as they were the most productive group to target, along with day visitors in the Peak District and the coach/travel trade. They feel that less attention should be given to the potential visitors staying at PEAK resort due to the long timelines for this development and lack of control over the development.

The project group feel that the story of Chesterfield and the town's history was missing from the proposal document, they would like to see this threading through the eventual strategy particularly as the situation report notes that there is a lack of heritage and culture. The story will help to theme the proposals relating to arts and culture mentioned in the opportunities and options section to support the development of the town centre daytime offer.

It is important that this strategy becomes a living, working document. The project group support the inclusion of a timed action plan built into the strategy that can be monitored to ensure the vision is carried forward and delivered.

Open and Indoor Market and Events:

The project group feel that a two-stage approach is needed when considering the Market and future events. Thursday customers tend to be those from outside areas whereas those from the local Chesterfield area come into town on a Saturday or in the evening. The events programme is currently geared towards weekdays meaning that residents miss out, or are not aware of, events; however this needs to change so that events are held on evenings and/or weekends so that local residents benefit.

The potential of events that bring new visitors into the town, such as the Records Fair and Artisan Market, could be maximised by extending these events into the early evening to support the early evening economy. Those attending these markets also tend to spend more money than on the general market, making it more attractive to future stall holders.

Revitalising the Heart of Chesterfield: this project needs to tie in together with this strategy and there needs to be an awareness that the vision for this project goes beyond the market.

Arts and culture:

The buildings already in Chesterfield should be capitalised. Council ownership of the Pavements shopping centre brings opportunities for art exhibits or museum installations in the empty units. The museum has a wealth of exhibits, there needs to be greater and varied opportunities to share these with visitors to Chesterfield. The new Innovation Centre on the Donut could contain an exhibit on the findings of the archaeological digs.

Accommodation:

The project group generally agree that there is a need for more budget hotels however they also feel that there needs to be a clearer picture of what self-catering is available, in particular Airbnb. Families travelling long distances to visit friends and relatives will not worry as much about renting accommodation a few miles outside Chesterfield so there needs to be clarity on what and where Airbnb accommodation is in Chesterfield for those that are searching for it.

Marketing:

The project group strongly agree with the concerns about the split of marketing resources (i.e. Destination Chesterfield/Visit Chesterfield) and the duplication; this leads to a confusing image for visitors. They feel that there needs to be more clarity on the role of the different organisations involved in promoting Chesterfield as a visitor destination. This needs to be consolidated into a single marketing image to improve access to information when visitors use internet searches to plan their visit.

The staff at the visitor information centre are very knowledgeable about the town and are an underutilised resource.

Visitors by coach:

There used to be incentives for bringing coaches to Chesterfield, do these still exist? Marketing information could be developed to provide information to visitors arriving by coach in Chesterfield before they arrive so they know where to go and what is of interest. This can be supported by installing more story boards and maps to show you where to go when visitors arrived by coach or in car parks. The project group supports the idea of a "Town centre interpretation scheme".

Transport:

The project group acknowledged the difficulty in improving transport connectivity through the town due to the historic nature of the current road and rail layout. However, where possible, they would like to see connectivity improved, particularly access to and from the station which will be addressed through the station masterplan, and improved bus information.

Perceptions/other:

There is a mentality that everything has to be organised by the Council which needs addressing; events do not need to be organised by the Council, the Artisan Market is a successful example.

Another key challenge is transforming negative views held by local residents into positive views.

We need to be wary of where funding would come from, we need to have a clear vision before seeking funding.

Appendix 2: SPG written response to consultation on draft visitor economy strategy.

Scrutiny Project Group response to Visitor Economy Strategy consultation

The proposed core proposition for the development of Chesterfield's visitor economy is:

'A lively market town with the iconic Crooked Spire Church, Chesterfield inspires day and staying visitors with its unique mix of independents, markets, events, festivals and borough-wide attractions, providing a great base from which to explore Derbyshire and the Peak District'.

1. Do you agree with this core proposition or would you suggest any changes to this?

- Insert either "ancient" or "historic" prior to market town i.e. "A lively historic market town..."
 - Reason: The addition of either "ancient" or "historic" introduces the historical element and plants the idea that there is a story to Chesterfield, ready to be built on later in the strategy.
- Move "Crooked Spire Church" to after "with its unique mix..." and remove the word "Church" i.e. "with the iconic Crooked Spire and its unique mix of independents..."
 - Reason: Moving "Crooked Spire" to later in the sentence keeps the emphasis on the town as a whole, with the Spire listed amongst the other attractions. Many people do not identify the Crooked Spire as being a Church and simply refer to it as the "Crooked Spire", so we suggest streamlining the wording.
- "great base" – find an alternative word for base.
 - Reason: The emphasis should be on Chesterfield first with the ability to explore wider areas as a secondary option. Rather than saying "base", we suggest replacing this with a word that implies that Chesterfield is the main destination however the town is also well situated for exploring Derbyshire and the Peak District should visitors wish to.
 - An ending suggestion from an SPG member: "....providing a superb location from which to venture further into the wonders of the Peak District."
- Summary of the proposed changes incorporated into the core proposition:
 - "A lively historic market town, Chesterfield inspires day and staying visitors with the iconic Crooked Spire and its unique mix of independents, markets, events, festivals and borough-wide attractions,

providing a superb location from which to venture further into the wonders of the Peak District.”

2. The Strategy outlines seven priorities which are listed below. Where 1 is not really a priority and 10 is an absolute priority, to what extent do you think these are a priority for developing our visitor economy over the next five years?

1) Creating great places that people enjoy spending time in.

- Score: 10/10
- Add “staying” into the wording i.e. “...people enjoy staying and spending time in”
 - Reason: Reflects the ambition to increase the dwell time of visitors by setting the expectation that visitors will be staying in the town.

2) Developing the Crooked Spire experience.

- Score: 10/10
- Include mention of Chesterfield’s story.” i.e. “Developing Chesterfield’s historic story and the Crooked Spire experience.”
 - Reason: Making this addition will allow the different threads of the town’s history to be linked together (the town’s ancient history and the Crooked Spire); the Church and proposed visitor experience is situated where the original Roman fort was located and linking the history together will maximise the opportunities for the visitor experience.

3) Maximising the visitor potential of the PEAK Resort development.

- Score: 8/10
- No changes, agree with this priority as PEAK Resort will be a good development for Chesterfield.
- Possibly add something to do with working to develop direct input to the PEAK technology and connectivity i.e. booking meals, theatre etc. via a PEAK system.

4) Developing a year-round programme of speciality & festival markets and events.

- Score: 10/10
- Amend the order of the wording to “programme of speciality markets, festivals and events”.

- Reason: There is a distinction between speciality markets and festivals (which may not have markets e.g. Cricket festival) so changing the wording will clarify this.
- Include “enhancing” i.e. “Developing and enhancing a year-round...”
 - Reason: Recognises that there is already a year-round programme in place which will be supplemented and developed.

5) Enhancing Chesterfield’s cultural and heritage offer.

- Score: 10/10
- Include “sharing” i.e. “Enhancing and sharing Chesterfield’s...”
 - Reason: Recognises that Chesterfield has a cultural and heritage offer already that needs to be shared more widely as well as being enhanced.
- Add “...offer by broadening the locations and means used to tell the story.” e.g. temporary, portable displays, pictorial story, using Vicar Lane big screen.

6) Securing new hotel provision in Chesterfield.

- Score: 8/10
- Amend wording to “Securing additional accommodation provision in Chesterfield.”
 - Reason: Specifying “hotel provision” limits the scope of accommodation available in Chesterfield. Altering this to “additional accommodation provision” broadens the variety of accommodation on offer.

7) A ‘Chesterfield Inspired’ marketing approach.

- Score: 10/10
- No changes, this priority is key to rest of the strategy as visitors need to know about Chesterfield and what is happening in Chesterfield.

3. Would you like to suggest any other priorities or projects that the Strategy should look to deliver?

- Continue to offer a town that is entertaining, fun, safe and inclusive.
 - Reason: Important to emphasize the “safe” and “inclusive” qualities of the town and build on the effective relationships with the police.