

DRAFT

North West Leicestershire Tourism Strategy

This draft version has not be subject to design input from the district's Communications Team, appropriate tourism images and design styles to be applied to the FINAL version.

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1 Introduction

This is a tourism strategy for North West Leicestershire, it sets out a plan for how we will establish the district within the broader context of the tourism 'destination', attracting staying and day visitors from across the UK and beyond.

The strategy has been produced by North West Leicestershire District Council for the whole of the district, working with North West Leicestershire Tourism Promotions Board. This strategy is the expression of a shared ambition to improve the business of tourism in the North West Leicestershire area. It provides a clear road map for all partners from all sectors to follow. It sits above a number of action plans already in progress and ensures that 'the sum of the parts is much stronger.'

This strategy requires accommodation and tourism attraction businesses, heritage organisations, landowners, town and parish council, communities and organisations and everyone who has an interest in the business of tourism in the district to work together. The 'we' referred to in this strategy means all these partners.

2 Ambition

Together we will clearly and firmly establish the district within the broader context of the tourism 'destination', attracting staying and day visitors from across the UK and beyond.

We will aim to deliver:

- An agreed, cohesive 'script' for presenting the area's distinctive tourism stories, increasing understanding and awareness of the assets of the destination
- A solution for the way in which we label and describe the area to a visitor audience
- Increases in the availability of guest accommodation
- The majority of partner businesses promoting online
- The majority of appropriate businesses actively engaged, informed and involved

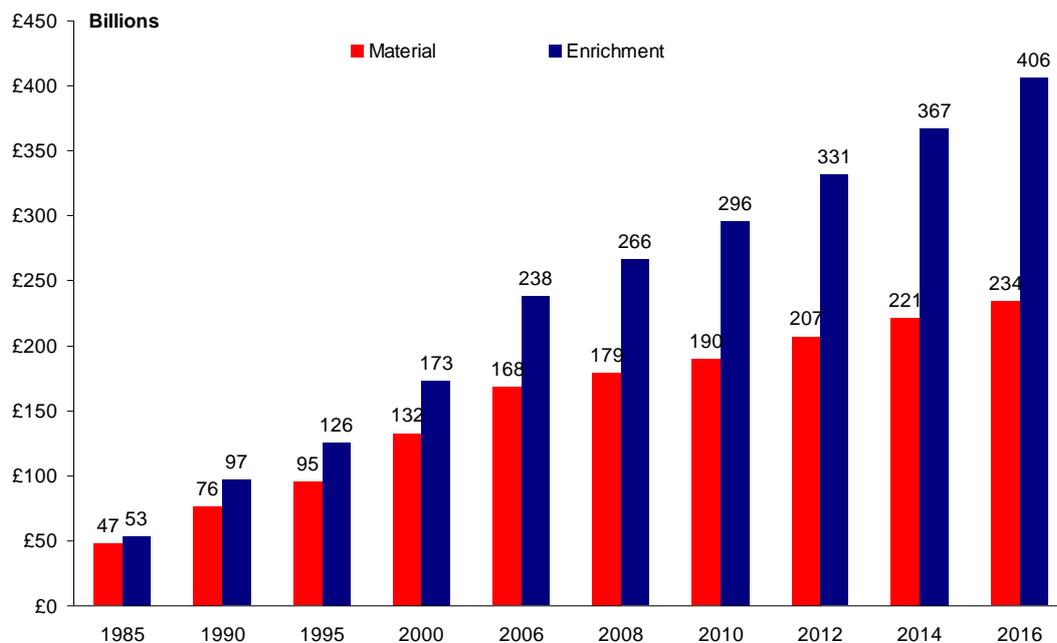
Resulting in:

- 8% Growth in economic activity over 3 years through greater visitor spend

3 Tourism Economy Context

Tourism is ever changing. The concept of tourism now embraces all manner of leisure pursuits, from undertaking activities to visiting attractions, attending events and staying overnight. It includes the economic activity of residents and their visiting friends and relations, as well as the traditional visitor from outside of the area. There is currently a significant trend towards attracting domestic tourism and towards attracting greater 'consumption' of tourism by ever more focused consumer segments. Underlying all this is a continuing growth in leisure and in the wider aspects of an improved quality of life. Whilst economic conditions remain challenging, there are sizeable sectors of the population with disposable incomes and time to enjoy increased leisure activity. Recently there is a significant trend to consumers preferring to spend on 'experiences' rather than buying more 'stuff.' This is particular presents many opportunities for tourism growth. This is measured by the 'enrichment index.'

The 'enrichment' index in the UK



Source: National Statistics/nVision
Base: UK

This move towards the purchase of experiences is a genuine opportunity for an emerging destination. Combine the 'thirst' for new experiences with the growing impact of social media and we get a very strong opportunity. Not only do people want to buy experiences, they want to buy new experiences that are 'boast-worthy!'

Recent economic, social and environmental issues have all had a significant impact on the nature of tourism in England. Taking leisure breaks in the UK continues to be fashionable - the 'stay-cation' phenomenon is here to stay.

4 Our Offer

Visual – a map of the district identifying key settlements and attractions

To include:

Key towns/villages
National Forest area
Sustrans routes (National cycle network)
East Midlands Airport
Donington Park
Key attractions

Visual – Awards

To include:

A selection of our recent achievements

5 The Business of Tourism in the District

The business of tourism in the North West Leicestershire area comprises:

- 280 square kilometres (108 sq miles) of attractive English countryside in the heart of the National Forest
- Two main towns of Ashby de la Zouch with its attractive shopping streets and lanes and Coalville with its heritage sites and green spaces
- Large areas of newly planted woodland due to much of the district being part of The National Forest plus ancient woodland and regenerated open spaces including Sence Valley Forest Park, Donisthorpe Woodland Park, Snibston Country Park, Grace Dieu Woods, Cloud Trail and Green Flag accredited Coalville Park
- A strong social and industrial heritage offer that includes Coalville, mining heritage, Ashby de la Zouch Castle, Grace Dieu Priory, Swannington Incline Plane, Moira Furnace and 1620s Manor House
- A good range of restaurants, bars and artisan food producers
- Around 75 accommodation providers offering between them over 4,000 bed spaces
- Over 15 specified visitor attractions, including award winning attraction Conkers, unique experiences such as Ashby Lido and family friendly fun at Hicks Lodge Cycle Centre
- Over 100 pubs, restaurants and bars, tea rooms, coffee houses and farm shops, two theatres and Ashby de la Zouch's night time economy with Purple Flag accreditation
- A growing range of quality festivals and events including award winning Timber and Download (both winners at the UK Festival Awards 2018)
- Home to an international airport East Midlands Airport and internationally renowned and historically significant race circuit Donington Park
- Bardon Hill being the highest point in Leicestershire offering views reaching all surrounding counties
- A wide range of supporting facilities and services

6 Where are we now? Looking at the evidence

The value of tourism to North West Leicestershire

The last measurement of the size of the tourism economy in the district was undertaken in 2016 using the STEAM*¹ model. At that time, the sector was valued at £205m and accounted for 2121 jobs.

Serviced accommodation

Whilst occupancy details are not available specifically for the District, over the last five years the serviced accommodation sector in Leicestershire (not including the city urban area) has seen occupancy levels grow by over 18% from 55.3% to 65.4%.

During the same period the key indicators of financial performance, measured by ADR² and Revpar³ have risen by 44% and 70% respectively to £57.07 and £37.31. These indicate increasing pressure on supply and that there may well be demand that cannot be met with current provision. This is especially true in North West Leicestershire.

Market intelligence and evidence

In preparing the recent Leicester and Leicestershire Tourism Growth Plan the following marketing intelligence found:

Day visitors:

The area attracted around 34.9 million visitors in 2018, of which the vast majority (89%, over 31 million) were day visitors⁴.

Overnight visitors:

We welcome 3.76 million staying visitors⁵ each year and domestic overnight trips to our area are increasing – from 8.6 million overnight trips in 2009 to 10.7 million in 2018⁶. Whilst overnight trips account for only 11% of visitor numbers, they account for 39% of economic impact⁷. Peak months for staying visitors are December, July and August.

Visiting Friends and Relatives

A high proportion of overnight trips to the area are visits to friends and family (56%)⁸

¹ *STEAM – Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor STEAM is a tourism economic impact modelling process which approaches the measurement of tourism from the bottom up, through its use of local supply side data and tourism performance and visitor survey data collection.

² An average daily rate (ADR) is a metric widely used in the hospitality industry to indicate the average realised room rental per day.

³ Revenue per available room (RevPAR) is a performance metric used in the hotel industry and is calculated by dividing a hotel's total room revenue by the total number of available rooms in the period being measured.

⁴ STEAM Final Trend Report Greater Leicestershire 2009-2018

⁵ The GB Tourist 2018 Annual Report

⁶ BRES. Nomis, 2019

⁷ UK Business Count. Nomis, 2019

⁸ Leicester and Leicestershire Business Survey 2018

Business Tourism

19% of domestic overnight trips to our area are for business purposes, compared to the national average of 14%⁵

Jobs

The visitor economy in 2018 supported 18,103 FTE jobs through direct tourism expenditure and a further 4,973 jobs through indirect tourism revenue⁴ – almost as many as the retail sector. The Office for National Statistics (ONS)⁶ shows tourism industry employment in our area increased by 35.5% compared to a 20.2% increase in England as a whole between 2012 and 2017.

Tourism enterprises:

The ONS business count data⁷ shows that the number of tourism industry enterprises in our area has increased by 18.2% between 2013 and 2018 compared to a 20.2% increase in England as whole. In a business survey undertaken in 2018, the majority of respondents reported improved business performance compared to five years ago and 65% expected performance to be better over the next five years. 84% of businesses surveyed were planning for growth⁸.

What this data told us:

- **Tourism is a growth sector.** The value of the sector, the number of visitors and the number of tourism enterprises in our area are all growing. Local businesses are optimistic about business performance over the next five years.
- **The visitor economy needs to thrive** to maintain its value to the local economy of £1.88bn⁹, support a growing number of tourism enterprises and the 23,076⁹ people directly or indirectly employed in the sector.
- **Leicester and Leicestershire are currently dominated by day trips** because we are within easy distance of a big population. If we are to convert day to stay, we need to attract visitors from a wider geographical area, especially those with easy road and rail links. People travelling longer distances are more likely to stay overnight.
- **We need to increase the number and value of staying visitors.** Staying visitors have greatest impact on our local economy but account for just 11% of total visitor numbers and we have spare capacity in our serviced accommodation stock.
- **Local residents need to be tourism ambassadors for Leicester and Leicestershire.** The visiting friends and family market is important and we need to ensure that local people and students at our universities are our tourism ambassadors.
- **We have a high value business tourism sector to capitalise on.**

⁹ STEAM Final Trend Report Greater Leicestershire 2009-2018

We then carried out extensive visitor and non-visitor research, consulted widely with local tourism businesses and undertook desk-based research to find out how we can further unlock the potential of the sector.

What we found out from visitors and non-visitors:

- Awareness and understanding of what the destination has to offer tourists, and the perception of the quality of that offer, is a significant barrier to sector growth. Non-visitors are unsure of what is on offer whilst those who have visited are muted in their evaluation.
- Leicester is recognised for its vibrant cultural diversity and its connectivity (in terms of transport links).
- There was no strong sense of place for Leicestershire compared to other rural shires but there was a sense of rural beauty and tranquillity.
- Individual towns' narratives are not particularly distinctive: they come across as low-key, gentle, familiar and small-scale.
- Food is a strong theme and Melton Mowbray has the highest food-related profile.
- Visitors said that a good quality shopping offer, centred on independents and markets, would be a particular motivator to visit.

What we found out from businesses:

- The main barriers to growth identified by tourism businesses surveyed were: profile of the region as a tourism destination, increased operating costs, increased competition, economic uncertainty and access/parking. There is a feeling that the area needs to crystalize its identity and everyone needs to use it.
- Local tourism businesses were asked to select from a list what Leicester and Leicestershire could do better to attract more visitors. 'More/better marketing of the place' was selected by 73% of respondents, followed by 'better transport to and around Leicester and Leicestershire' (61%), 'better signage and visitor information' (56%) and 'events and festivals' (50%).
- Young people are not drawn to the sector for work. There needs to be more sector engagement in schools to make careers in tourism and hospitality more attractive.
- Businesses are pro-development but many key attractions are at capacity.
- Day visitors dominate. Much of the visitor economy is 'local'.

What we found out from our desk research:

- The area's waterways (70 miles of water and eight rivers) have untapped leisure potential.
- In on-line, travel brand and 'official' references to the area, including Google search and social media platforms, there was a lack of a shared place narrative for the wider destination and there was little use of place by non-tourism organisations, or by visitor attractions themselves.

What this data tells us:

- **We need to establish a clear identity for the area and promote it through a coherent campaign** that is easy to get behind and straightforward for businesses to adopt.
- **All stakeholders understand that the whole (Leicester + Shire) can be more than the sum of the parts.**
- **There are some areas of untapped potential** including the waterways, the retail offer, food and drink offer and business tourism.
- **There are a range of infrastructure challenges** that need to be addressed to underpin the growth of the sector including skills, accessibility and the visitor welcome
- **Businesses want to see a shift from reliance on local day visitors.**

7 Audience Research

Recent research for the National Forest Tourism Growth Plan and Leicester and Leicestershire Tourism Growth Plan identified focussing on the following audiences to help to guide and inform marketing and product development:

National Forest Tourism Growth Plan

- Fun Families
- Easy Active Adults
- New Traditionals
- Special Interest Groups

Leicester and Leicestershire Tourism Growth Plan

- Empty-nester couples with traditional values
- Active Family Fun Seekers
- Free and Easy Mini-Breakers

As a priority we will focus on the following audiences:

Empty-nester couples with traditional values

- Older generations who appreciate heritage and culture – over 50s
- Mid levels of affluence - but with fewer, if any, family members to cater for when on holiday
- Keen to be guided and explore city, towns and countryside
- Enjoy short breaks in the UK that offer a wealth of cultural experiences, connections to the country's heritage, industry and countryside
- Eating, drinking, socialising is an important part of the experience – particularly local produce
- Higher than average consumption of broadsheets and UK tourism websites
- Want things to be easy and no hassle
- Will come for day and overnight trips, linking with heritage and cultural events and festivals
- Good quality, secure accommodation is important when booking a holiday

Active Family Fun Seekers

- Families and groups of families with kids under 16
- Multi-generational and blended families
- Mid levels of affluence – but prepared to spend and treat themselves when they are on holiday
- Want lots to do – whatever the weather
- Particularly interested in visitor attractions, activities, events
- Interested in learning – but in stimulating, fun, interactive ways
- “If kids are happy we are happy”
- Eating, drinking, socialising is an important part of the experience
- Interested in both city and rural areas
- Will come for day and overnight trips as well as visiting friends and relatives, depending on their particular circumstances
- Motivated by family-orientated experiences, accommodation and activities
- Want ideas and inspiration

Free and Easy Mini-Breakers

- Typically younger – under 35s
- Enjoy travelling – solo, couples, groups
- Mid levels of affluence and enjoy spending on themselves
- Want lots to do – like to cram as much into a break as possible
- Up for activities – like to give things a go – “You only live once”
- Social experiences really important

- Sense of place important - get to know the place
- Interested in insider tips – “live like a local”
- Want things to be easy and no hassle
- Want experiences to share and ideally brag about
- Most likely to base themselves in the city – but will travel out for the right experience
- Will come for overnight stays
- Visiting friends is an important sub-segment
- Events (festivals, music, sporting & cultural) are a particular motivator to “come-now”

8 Going for growth

The priority of this plan is to develop a strong proposition to put before prospective visitors in order to maximise the return on marketing investment. This is both **the places** and **the experiences**.

Rather than jumping right in with the marketing activity, we will take time to strengthen all aspects of the offer and therefore achieve much greater success when the marketing and communications activity commences. We need to ensure that new visitors discovering our area for the first time have a great experience, cover their social media with amazing photos and become champions of our offer.

8.1 The places – forests, towns and industrial heritage

We are yet to find anyone who feels that North West Leicestershire is an appropriate destination brand for the visitor market. And yet that is exactly how the area presents itself. This must change.

Our priorities will focus on:

- **The National Forest and the Forest Town of Ashby de la Zouch**¹⁰ – we will work with partners to develop opportunities to grow the National Forest as a tourism destination and to establish Ashby de la Zouch as a Forest Town and ‘the forest town’ to visit whilst in the National Forest
- **Heart of the Forest Vision**¹¹ - we will support and work with the National Forest and partners to develop a Heart of the Forest masterplan to achieve its aims and outcomes
- **Coalville, Snibston Park and districtwide industrial heritage**¹² - we will continue to work with partners to build on the success of industrial heritage initiatives, such as: ‘The Many Faces of Palitoy’ project, Snibston Park, Moira Furnace and Hello Heritage

8.2 Accommodating the visitor

Recognising a serious shortage of accommodation supply in the district, an accommodation demand study was commissioned and completed in April 2019. An extract of the full report is shown in appendix one, detailing:

Recommendations – capitalising on the opportunities

- The Council’s Role Going Forward
- Working with Sub-Regional Partners
- Specific Council Actions
- Budget Implications

¹⁰ Strategic Priority 3: Strategic Product Development – Activity three: Developing Local Destinations (Leicester and Leicestershire Tourism Growth Plan)

¹¹ Strategic priority 3: Strategic Product Development – Activity one: Backing our Winners (Leicester and Leicestershire Tourism Growth Plan)

¹² Strategic priority 1: Creating a Strong, Distinctive and Visible Destination – Uncover the Story ((Leicester and Leicestershire Tourism Growth Plan)

8.3 The experience - supporting visitor economy growth

Underpinning this are two existing pieces of work – there is a tourism action plan (the blueprint). Also underway is a fundamental review of the role that the district council plays in driving visitor economy growth and maximising the return on its investment. As this strategy demonstrates, tourism today requires a very different approach to that of 1990 when the primary role of a local authority was to physically give information to visitors, a role largely redundant since the advent of smart phones and the digital era.

Our priority will focus on continuing to develop and deliver the tourism blueprint for North West Leicestershire, driving practical activity on the ground through a proactive tourism partnership (a summary of key themes and key tasks are detailed in appendix two).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS - CAPITALISING ON THE OPPORTUNITIES

6.1 The Council's Role Going Forward

6.1.1. Hotel and visitor accommodation development is ultimately a matter for the market to determine and new hotels and visitor accommodation businesses will undoubtedly come forward in North West Leicestershire without any intervention from the District Council other than in terms of its role as the local planning authority. There are however a number of ways in which the Council can more proactively support and encourage hotel and visitor accommodation development in the district in terms of supporting the more strategic initiatives that other sub-regional partners are progressing to accelerate accommodation development, and a number of specific actions that the District Council can undertake within the district.

6.2. Working with Sub-Regional Partners

6.2.1. Accommodation development is identified as a priority in the Tourism Growth Plan for The National Forest and the emerging Tourism Growth Plan for Leicester & Leicestershire. Hotel Solutions is currently helping the National Forest Company to formulate a Visitor Accommodation Development Acceleration Plan for the National Forest. Marketing Leicester & Leicestershire is progressing a data capture exercise to identify a series of growth projects that will form the Tourism Growth Plan going forward, and that it is feeding through to the Leicester & Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership to help inform the preparation of its new Local Industrial Strategy. Hotel Solutions has advised Marketing Leicester & Leicestershire of the work that we are undertaking for North West Leicestershire and The National Forest, which they have agreed to identify in the Tourism Growth Plan.

National Forest Visitor Accommodation Development Acceleration Plan

6.2.2. The National Forest Company is currently looking at progressing a programme of action to accelerate and guide visitor accommodation development in The National Forest that will include:

- The publication of a National Forest Accommodation Development Prospectus and Design Principles Guide;
- The compilation of a directory of National Forest Company approved accommodation operators, suppliers and advisers that will be shared with NFC's Woodland Partners and other landowners to support them in progressing accommodation development projects that are in line with The National Forest brand values;
- A conference in early 2020 to launch the directory and raise awareness of the opportunities for accommodation development in The National Forest;
- Follow-up support for priority accommodation development proposals;
- The possible roll out by the National Forest Company of a National Forest branded accommodation offer, either through direct operation or a franchise model with an accommodation operator partner.

6.2.3. North West Leicestershire District Council should seek to support the implementation of the Acceleration Plan as opportunities arise, contributing funding and staff resource where required.

Leicester & Leicestershire Places to Stay Programme

- 6.2.4. Hotel Solutions has suggested a programme of actions for the Places to Stay strand of the Leicester & Leicestershire Tourism Growth Plan in terms of:
- Raising awareness of the accommodation development opportunities across the county through workshops and publications.
 - Work to identify land and property owners that are interested in accommodation development – and work then to assess the suitability of their land and property for accommodation development;
 - Consultancy support to help land and property owners to assess the potential of their sites and buildings for accommodation development and progress to design and feasibility work;
 - Work to identify hotel and visitor accommodation developers that may be interested in Leicestershire, and to match them to land and property owners that they may be able to work with;
 - Assessing opportunities for local authority owned sites and buildings;
 - Looking at opportunities for direct local authority investment in, and LLEP funding for hotel and visitor accommodation projects;
 - Marketing training and advice for small accommodation business owners.
- 6.2.5. While it remains to be seen whether these suggestions are eventually adopted, the priority for NWLDC is to ensure that the finalised Visitor Accommodation Study is fed through to Marketing Leicester & Leicestershire to ensure that it is fully aware of the hotel and visitor accommodation development opportunities that have been identified for North West Leicestershire. We recommend that the District Council should seek to engage in the Places to Stay Programme as relevant opportunities arise, perhaps also contributing financially to programme or project budgets.

6.3. Specific Council Actions

- 6.3.1. In terms of more specific actions that the Council can progress, we would recommend the following interventions:
- a. Investigate hotel site availability at Flagstaff Park.
 - b. Approach Travelodge to establish if they would be interested in Ashby de la Zouch as a hotel development location, and what support they would need from the District Council to bring forward a hotel here. This could include commissioning research to evidence the local corporate demand for a further hotel in Ashby. It might also include consideration of direct Council investment, in the way that other local authorities have done to secure new hotels and generate an ongoing revenue stream for the council. Appendix 10 provides examples of how local authorities and public sector bodies are investing in hotel development; Appendix 11 provides some background on Travelodge's partnerships with local authorities.
 - c. Engage proactively with the developers of the Royal Ashby project to support them in the renovation of the Royal Hotel. Feed the project through to Marketing Leicester & Leicestershire for inclusion in the Tourism Growth Plan.
 - d. Follow up the interest in accommodation development expressed by Willesley Park Golf Club, and consider how the Council may be able to support accommodation development here.
 - e. Organise a workshop to raise awareness of accommodation development opportunities in Ashby de la Zouch, in conjunction with the Ashby Project.
 - f. Target some of the Council's grant support for business start-ups on accommodation development projects in Ashby de la Zouch.
 - g. Leading on the development of a concept and business plan for an accommodation operation at Moira Furnace, working with the National Forest Charitable Trust, National Forest Company, the existing operators at the site, and

potential accommodation partners. The business plan should consider the potential for, and benefits of, direct Council investment in an accommodation operation at Moira Furnace and potential sources of financial assistance e.g. from LLEP, NLHF.

- h. Support Forest Holidays in bringing forward a holiday lodge park scheme at Hicks Lodge.
- i. Work with the National Forest Charitable Trust and National Forest Company to progress a strategy for a major resort development on the Heart of the Forest sites; this should include a masterplanning re-fresh; site technical investigations and prioritisation; and work to develop the potential offer, business model and partnership opportunities.
- j. Take account of the study findings in the Local Plan Review to develop policies that will facilitate the delivery of the visitor accommodation that market potential has been identified for – particularly in the countryside and for developments of scale.

6.3.2. We would suggest that hotel development at the East Midlands Airport can be left to the market, without a need for proactive Council intervention.

6.4. Budget Implications

6.4.1. We would suggest that the Council may need a budget of £7-8,000 for consultancy support to assist it in progressing the recommended specific actions for the District Council. In terms of contributing to the budgets for the National Forest Accommodation Development Strategy and Leicester & Leicestershire Places to Stay Programme, we would suggest a figure of £10-15,000 p.a. as a sensible budget planning amount to consider.

Overview: North West Leicestershire Tourism Blueprint – key themes and key tasks (key actions under review/development)

Key theme	Key tasks
<p>Supporting the two centres of Coalville and Ashby</p>	<p>National profile for Ashby de la Zouch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish Ashby de la Zouch as a Forest Town and ‘the forest town’ to visit whilst in the National Forest • Improve links and representation of Ashby de la Zouch and National Forest attractions <p>Industrial Heritage Campaign</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Position Coalville as the start-point for an expanded and developed industrial heritage trail with associated activities and packages etc. further develop and expand the ‘hello heritage’ event • Consider the ‘Coalville and Local Area Heritage Strategy and Action Plan’ and support the agreed priorities that compliment this initiative, including Snibston Park developments <p>Online</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and reposition the visitor websites, introduce separate URL’s for Ashby and Coalville
<p>Re-confirming the strong relationship between the district and the National Forest</p>	<p>Short breaks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the NFC and partners to develop and launch a series of short-break packages and promotions • Provide accommodation providers with bolt on experiences for guests • Explore corporate offer and cross promotion opportunities <p>Websites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure effective cross-promotion and linkages between partner websites (complimentary not duplication) <p>Packaging events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore building accommodation packages around existing events and activities • Coordinate packages around events including Timber, working with accommodation providers
<p>Supporting the need to develop new product to facilitate sector growth</p>	<p>Accommodation Demand report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission a report to analyse the current supply across all accommodation sectors, map and forecast future demand growth and identify and provide an evidence base for what additional stock will be needed. • Implement the recommendations of the report
<p>Maximising the impact of the growing programme of events in the area</p>	<p>Events as attractors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify up to three existing or new events that can be supported to grow and develop to widen their appeal and attract staying guests. • Explore opportunities to encourage repeat business from visitors to existing events and festivals <p>Supporting growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify targeted grant funding to stimulate and facilitate growth and support increased marketing and communications <p>Facilitating</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and remove barriers to growth, e.g. parking limitations