

## **Midlothian Tourism Action Plan 2016-20: Progress Report**

### **Report by Dr Mary Smith, Director of Education, Communities and Economy**

#### **1.0 Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet following the launch of the Midlothian Tourism Action Plan 2016-20 and to outline some of the key themes and activities contained within it.

#### **2.0 Background**

##### **National Context**

- 2.1 The national tourism strategy, Tourism Scotland 2020 was launched in June 2012, with an ambition to grow visitor spend across the country by £1billion. In October 2015, the STA (Scottish Tourism Alliance), the industry body responsible for coordinating delivery of the strategy, further commissioned a midterm strategy review, the findings of which were announced in March 2016 during Scottish Tourism Week.

- 2.2 The national strategy has the undernoted key areas of focus:

Nature & Activities	Heritage & Culture Tourism
Events & Festivals	Food & Drink
Destinations, Towns & Cities	Sustainability
Business Tourism	Digital Connectivity
Tourism Skills	

- 2.3 Its midterm review identified the alignment of key sector strategies including the Scottish Government Economic Strategy with the national strategy and encouraged further local/regional strategy alignment. The review identified the undernoted four further priorities to help support the industry and create conditions for growth:

- 2.3.1 Strengthen digital capabilities.
- 2.3.2 Strengthen industry leadership.
- 2.3.3 Enhance the quality of the visitor experience.
- 2.3.4 Influence investment, specifically flight access and transport connectivity, built infrastructure, digital connectivity and business growth finance.

##### **Local Context**

- 2.4 Tourism is a key economic growth sector within Midlothian. Figures from the latest regional Midlothian 2015 STEAM report (Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) show in general terms that the numbers of visitors coming to Midlothian is increasing, they are staying longer and they are spending more.

Visitor days throughout the region from 2009-2015 have increased by 4.4%, visitor numbers by 2.5%. The economic impact of tourism in Midlothian from the combined direct and indirect visitor spend rose from £83.66 million in 2009 to £105.28 million in 2015; a growth of 25.9%.

2.5 The ambition to support tourism as one of Midlothian's key sectors is embedded throughout the Council's and Midlothian Community Planning Partnership's (MCP) local strategies. Ambitious Midlothian, the overarching strategic economic recovery plan for Midlothian, recognises the importance of the sector and endorsed the previous 2013-15 MTAP. Ambitious Midlothian is supported through the Sustainable Growth theme within the Single Midlothian Plan 2016-17. Ambitious Midlothian further identifies the need to maximise the socio-economic benefits of the Borders Railway.

2.6 One of the key themes within the Borders Rail Blueprint is "Great Destinations to Visit". Under this a number of tourism focussed projects have already been funded with the aspiration of growing visitor numbers to the area travelling by rail. One of these funded projects, a Tourism Destination Audit, highlighted the gaps and opportunities for tourism development in the area. Following this and further funded through the Borders Railway Blueprint, a dedicated Business Gateway Tourism Advisor was commissioned to work with tourism businesses between Midlothian and Borders for a one year period to help maximise the tourism opportunities from the railway.

2.7 The national strategy and much of the findings identified within the Tourism Destination Audit have served as the framework for consultation on and development of, the Midlothian Tourism Action Plan (MTAP) 2016-20.

2.8 MTAP 2016-20

At the local level, tourism development and promotion in Midlothian is driven forward by the undernoted key partners:

- Midlothian Tourism Forum (MTF).
- Midlothian Council.
- VisitScotland (VS).

2.9 The Council and VS work closely with the local tourism trade (through the MTF) in respect of tourism promotion and development in Midlothian. In the development of the MTAP 2016-20 industry leads were identified from within the private sector to consult on a series of key themes mirroring the national strategy.

These are highlighted as follows:

- |                            |                              |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| - Outdoors and nature      | - Cycling                    |
| - Built and local heritage | - Young people/youth tourism |
| - Food and drink           | - Business tourism           |
| - Events                   |                              |

2.10 Consultation sessions around these themes, led by the MTF, were held with key stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors, the findings and priorities from which has formed the basis of the actions within the new MTAP 2016-20.

- 2.11 These actions capitalise on Midlothian's strengths and opportunities. The MTAP 2016-20 was formally launched at Midlothian's first tourism conference in May 2016 by Ian Gardner, Chair of MTF and Director of Rosslyn Chapel together with Provost Joe Wallace and the Chief Executive of VisitScotland, Malcolm Roughhead.
- 2.12 Since the short time of its launch, the MTF in partnership with the Council have already seen some success in driving these actions forward. A programme to strengthen the digital capabilities of the industry has been developed, fitting with the first priority of the midterm National Strategy review. MTF as lead applicant, working alongside Scottish Borders Area Tourism Partnership have also secured a grant award of £200,000 from Scottish Enterprise (SE) to drive forward tourism activity in the area. This collaborative approach backed by Midlothian and Scottish Borders Councils will see a further match grant award of £150,000 from Borders Railway Blueprint Fund. This funding will be used for collaborative product development and strategic tourism activity. This level of award will be used as a mechanism to help drive some of the key actions within the MTAP 2016-20 aligning to the national strategy midterm review priorities. The award in itself also helps highlight the confidence within the local sector and key partners to deliver.

### **3 Report Implications**

#### **3.1 Resource**

No additional financial resources are requested from the Council to deliver the MTAP 2016-20. Existing Council budgets will be used where appropriate to help support activity. This will be in partnership with the MTF. External funding will be sought to help maximise existing financial resources and deliver specific actions.

In terms of human resource implications, any work undertaken in respect of the MTAP will be carried out by Economic Development Section staff in close liaison with other Council services and the relevant MCPP partners. Funding has been allocated from within the SE grant award to resource the continuation of the Blueprint funded Tourism Advisor role for the two year duration of that project along with the procurement of one additional project manager post. These posts are funded in full and will work between Midlothian and Scottish Borders.

#### **3.2 Risk**

There is a risk that failure to implement and drive forward the MTAP could result in continued growth for the sector not being achieved. Tourism is a key sector for Midlothian offering considerable economic benefit for the region including opportunities for employment. It is a vibrant sector, boasting strong partner relationship between industry, public sector stakeholders and neighbouring regions. Membership of the MTF continues to grow and the sector has seen considerable recent investment via the Borders Railway, Corn Exchange Building/Dalkeith Museum and Dalkeith Country Park. This MTAP builds on the research and opportunities identified within the recent Tourism Audit. It also links with the National Strategy Midterm review priorities. Driving forward the MTAP will help position Midlothian as an attractive and competitive place to visit, live and do business and contribute towards the overall national tourism aspiration to grow the industry and visitor economy.

### 3.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☐ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☒ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☒ Sustainable growth
- ☒ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

### 3.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Support of this MTAP 2016-20 will help deliver key outcomes and indicators within Ambitious Midlothian and the Single Midlothian Plan 2016/17. The nature of the strategy cuts across and complements the work of the sixteen Midlothian Neighbourhood plans in its aspiration to support activity, connectivity and regeneration within and between Midlothian's town centres and villages.

### 3.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

The priorities within the MTAP 2016-20 aim to capitalise on Midlothian's strengths and opportunities. It has been developed by the industry for the industry and as such identifies particular themes and actions which are at the heart of local need whilst linking with both national and local strategies. The MTAP builds on the success of national initiatives such as the Scottish Government Tourism Themed Years whilst also taking advantage of national industry programmes such as Digital Tourism Scotland to help build local capacity and skills.

### 3.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

An extensive and innovative programme of industry and stakeholder consultation took place in order to shape the development of this MTAP and identify key priorities.

An industry champion was identified for each of the seven MTAP focus themes. These were individuals working within the sector with specialist knowledge and experience within their area. Working alongside the Council, these industry champions led open half day workshops throughout the months of February and March inviting key stakeholders, individuals and groups from private, public and community sectors to feed into each theme. A total of seven workshops were held with over 100 attendees throughout. These sessions attracted good representation from local and national agencies such as VisitScotland, Historic Environment Scotland, Event Scotland and Young Scot as well as local businesses, education, CPP partners and neighbouring authorities. This was a new industry led approach to consulting with the sector which proved extremely successful and helped in itself to raise the profile of tourism in Midlothian, engage new groups and increase MTF membership.

### 3.7 Ensuring Equalities

The MTAP 2016-20 has been assessed against Midlothian Council's Combined Equalities Impact Assessment Framework. This has assessed the strategy as potentially providing a number of positive impacts for equalities groups including the following:

- Initiatives to engage with young people and children
- Training initiatives to improve industry awareness on issues around accessibility and encouraging industry to review their access statements
- Improved interpretation for a range of groups
- Improved links between education establishments and industry to create stronger pathways to employment
- Digital inclusion and training programmes
- Support for events development including community events which can help reduce isolation
- Improved access between towns/villages and transport links which will help towards accessibility of services

### 3.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

The nature of this MTAP encourages sustainable tourism development throughout all its activity. It impresses the importance and benefits in strong partnership working and collaboration at local, regional and national level. The strategy encourages shared learning and resources to help effective delivery of projects and reduce risk. By delivering training initiatives and programmes to improve industry standards it will help improve the quality of the visitor experience to help increase visitor numbers and spend.

The MTAP will be flexible enough to be able to respond to changes in market conditions and take advantage of opportunities within the external environment as required. For this reason the MTAP will be reviewed on an annual basis and key actions for the year ahead agreed and prioritised.

### 3.9 IT Issues

There are no IT issues arising from this report.

## 4 Recommendations

### 4.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- Notes the collaborative work undertaken between the Midlothian Tourism Forum, the Council and key partners to prepare the Midlothian Tourism Action Plan for 2016-20; and
- endorses the Midlothian Tourism Action Plan 2016-20 as an industry led strategy for local tourism development to be delivered in partnership with the Council.

**Date:** 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2016

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#### **Background Papers:**

Midlothian Tourism Action Plan 2016-20

Combined Equalities Impact Assessment Framework.