



**LOCUM**  
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CONSULTING

## **North Staffordshire Tourism Strategy**

## **Consultation Seminars**

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## 1 Introduction

Locum Destination Consulting has been commissioned to prepare a tourism strategy for North Staffordshire. An important stage of the project research was a series of stakeholder seminars which had the following goals:

- To find out more about the current state of tourism in the North Staffordshire
- To explore ideas for inclusion in the strategy

Representatives of companies and organisations across the region attended the seminars, including ceramics manufacturers, tourist attractions, accommodation providers and local authorities. A full list of participants can be seen overleaf (Exhibit 1).

The seminar briefing paper contained a strategic framework with which to approach the issues involved in the development of a North Staffordshire Tourism Strategy. This consisted of 7 strands which are outlined as follows:

- Strand 1: Branding and Marketing
- Strand 2 : Attractors
- Strand 3 : Infrastructure
- Strand 4 : Skills and Business Support
- Strand 5 : Organisation
- Strand 6 : Performance Measurement
- Strand 7 : Key Projects

It should be noted that there is an amount of overlap across these strategic strands, and that, as a result, discussion in all of the seminars moved freely between these topics. For the purposes of this report, however, they will be dealt with in separate sections.

Locum Destination Consulting would like to thank all attendees at these seminars.



**Exhibit 1: List of participants**

<i>Seminar ParticipantsName</i>	<i>Company</i>
James Virgin	Ambassador Theatre Group
Barry Collinson	Apedale Heritage Centre
Andrew Ashton	Apedale Heritage Centre
Jo Balsamo	Aynsley China
Phillip Baker	Bakers Coaches
Robert Copeland	Cheddleton Flint Mill Industrial Heritage Trust
Alison Morgan	Dudson
Hazel Cooke	Graythwaite Guest House
John Dekanter	InStaffs
Maureen Harrison	Keele Conference Park
Yvonne Allen	Knight & Sons
Diane Broach	Lichfield Borough Council
Michelle Nixon	Moorcroft Pottery
Barry Schofield	Newcastle Borough Council
Alan Miles	Portmerion Pottery
Pam Mallalieu	The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery
David Wedgewood	Potteries Shopping Centre
Paul Buckham	Royal Doulton
Vicki Steel	Royal Doulton
Nick Chambers	RSPB
Catherine Pearson	Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support
Elizabeth Moody	Royal Stafford Tableware
Norman Tempest	Royal Stafford Tableware
Craig Horton	Rudyard Lake
John Concannon	Severn Trent Water Ltd
Ray Elks	Spode Museum and Visitor Centre
Sally Coleman	Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Steve Smith	Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Richard Higgs	Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Bob Collins	Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Sue Walker	Tams Group Factory Shop
Mike Keane	Victoria Hall
Maureen Harris	Victoria Hotel
Mo Chaudry	Waterworld
Graeme Whitehead	Wedgwood Pottery
Pauline Newton	Yarnfield Park



## **2 Strand 1: Branding and Marketing**

Branding and marketing provided a central theme to which discussion regularly returned. This informed and shaped discussion across the other six strategic strands.

### **2.1 The current image of North Staffordshire**

The current image of North Staffordshire is influenced heavily by the city of Stoke-on-Trent. Seminar participants felt this to be to the detriment of North Staffordshire's overall identity, since the attractions of the Moorlands and the other towns are overlooked. Potential visitors may not be aware of North Staffordshire's tourism product beyond Stoke-on-Trent.

Stoke-on-Trent itself was felt to have a negative image, due in part to its traditionally stereotyped image of 'pits and pots'. The city's negative image is compounded by its confusing identity. As an agglomeration of six towns, it lacks a clear individual identity and can be confusing to the tourist or potential tourist.

Furthermore, participants stated that the city suffered from low civic pride, caused in part by this lack of city identity, and in part by the poor condition of the city's street and buildings. This has also been a result of negative press – both at local and national level.

As a result of its image, the city is regularly overlooked on a national and regional level in favour of Manchester and Birmingham. The image of Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire in general was felt to be an important issue to address.

### **2.2 Ideas for branding**

Participants at the seminars suggested several ways of improving the area's image through a strongly branded (hypothetical) marketing campaign. Discussion covered the different possible choices for a location brand to draw visitors to North Staffordshire, as well as examining the need for strong sub-brands.

#### **2.2.1 Location brand**

It was felt that a unified location brand would provide the first step in improving the quality of the area's image, as well as redefining the area's tourism product



and incorporating currently overlooked attractions. But what would the location brand be?

While some felt that North Staffordshire ought to have its own sub-regional brand, and others suggested that the most effective brand would encompass areas beyond the county boundaries (such as 'Heart of England'), the overwhelming majority preferred the concept of a single Staffordshire brand.

### 2.2.2 Sub-brands

Several propositions were made for sub-brands which could fit into a broader branding strategy. These included:

- Stoke-on-Trent
- The Potteries
- Staffordshire Moorlands
- Peak District
- North Staffordshire

The use of the term 'Potteries' was a subject of debate. Some felt that the word and its associated images were outdated and in need of replacing, while others suggested that the word conveyed the area's unique selling point, and appealed to the sectors of the tourist market interested in heritage.



### 3 Strand 2 : Attractors

This section deals with the discussion of North Staffordshire's tourism attractors, that is to say, features of North Staffordshire which attract potential visitors. The brief received by the seminar participants prior to the seminars highlighted the fact that attractors are not exclusively made up of *attractions*, but include anything which motivates a visit, whether this concerns restaurants, scenery or nightlife etc.

#### 3.1 Ceramics

Given the international reputation of Stoke-on-Trent for the design and manufacture of ceramics, one seminar was given over to the discussion of the industry and its role in attracting visitors to the area.

The ceramics industry is presently in a state of change, due to the impact of overseas imports and changing consumer trends. The current situation was discussed as well as strategies to ensure the position of the ceramics industry as an important attractor in the future.

##### 3.1.1 Current situation

Traditionally, coach tours have been a main source of visitors to the factories and factory shops, and still provide 50% of visitors in the case of some factories. These are often made up of women aged 40+, and in groups of about 10. Almost all factories reported a recent decline in coach trips, however, with more than one factory reporting a decrease of 60% in coach visits.

This change was attributed to several causes. These included:

- a general drop in coach tours in the UK
- a decline in the financial stability of the traditional coach market, that is, retired people
- poor infrastructure in the area (to be discussed in section 4)
- fewer foreign visitors, especially from the US
- excessive proliferation of factory shops

Schemes to reverse the trend have been attempted, including a seminar for coach companies showcasing the area's attractions, but the response has been



disappointing. It was generally felt that coach companies' response to marketing efforts was poor, and that any incentive schemes to encourage drivers to the factories would be met with a similar response.

The 'China Bus', which used to run between the city and several of the ceramics factories, has ceased to operate. The factories have noticed a decline in visitors as a result of this.

### 3.1.2 Ideas for the future

Given this decline in visitor numbers, the ceramics industry has begun exploring and implementing new strategies aimed at reviving and expanding its popularity with visitors. In some cases, this involves repositioning the company within the tourism market. Ideas which have been developed or considered include:

- Diversification of product in the shops - cookware etc
- 'Paint-your-own' cafés
- Featuring of contemporary artists
- Better facilities – cafés etc
- Maximisation of retail space – although this sometimes means sacrificing demonstration areas
- Website development
- Appeal to ceramics enthusiasts tracing old designs etc

Ideas that were considered in the seminar included:

- 'Driving trail' to guide car visitors around the ceramics factories
- Ceramic weekends hosted by the Council or the Museum / or spread events across the sites
- Ceramics passport scheme or similar to share visitors

### 3.1.3 The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery

The museum plays an important role within the ceramics tourism industry and has good relations with the manufacturers. It has 650,000 items, of which 10% are on display due to space restrictions. As well as ceramics, they have a substantial art



collection, and new gallery spaces are developed in order to encourage repeat visits. It has a higher level of local visits (70%) than the ceramics factories.

### 3.2 Moorlands

The Staffordshire Moorlands District includes 20% of the Peak District National Park, the second most visited National Park in the world. The area is positioned as a destination offering outdoor activities such as walking, cycling, fishing etc.

Many participants felt that the Moorlands are regarded as a separate entity from the rest of North Staffordshire, partly due to its strong presence in Peak District marketing campaigns. The Moorlands are also marketed through the Staffordshire Short Breaks campaign<sup>1</sup>, however, and links with Staffordshire are considered of high importance. Participants felt that 'destination North Staffordshire' would benefit from featuring the Moorlands and its attractions (Rudyard Lake, Tittesworth Reservoir, the Roaches etc) within a unified brand. It was also agreed that the ecotourism opportunities afforded by the Moorlands offer a healthy counterpoint to the city and industrial tourism offered elsewhere in the area.

The town of Leek was suggested as a gateway and possible site of a visitor centre for the National Park.

### 3.3 Business tourism

Business tourism was felt to be a key part of North Staffordshire's current tourism product and a fundamental feature of any future tourism strategy for the area. Participants felt that their location midway between Manchester and Birmingham lent itself ideally to this role.

It was recognised that, at present, North Staffordshire has a lack of top-quality hotel accommodation for business tourists, and that this ought to be addressed in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> The Moorlands are also marketed through the Staffordshire Short Breaks Campaign, SMDC is a sponsor and over 50% of accommodation who advertise in the campaign are located in the Moorlands. Staffordshire Moorlands DC also participate on the Conference Bureau



The Conference Bureau was seen as useful, however, there was some debate over whether it succeeded in attracting visitors from outside the area, or merely facilitated conference booking within the area.

### **3.4 Other opportunities**

#### **3.4.1 Alton Towers**

Participants felt that Alton Towers is already an extremely successful attraction, and that the potential benefit to the area is significant. There was often a perception that North Staffordshire could do more to retain theme park visitors, and to encourage them to visit elsewhere in the area. At present, 20% of visitors to Alton Towers stay overnight (up to 40% in peak season). The Tourist Information Point at Alton Towers is staffed two days a week in high season, although it has not been successful so far in receiving non park-related enquiries.

#### **3.4.2 Football clubs**

It was suggested that the area's football clubs do not currently contribute as much as they could to the image of the area as a tourism destination. Indeed, some felt that the area is affected negatively by the reputation of local football supporters for violence and racism. Participants believed that the football clubs have the potential to act as a more important tourism attractor.

#### **3.4.3 River and Canals**

Canal tourism was suggested as a potential attractor worthy of development. It was felt that the Trent River and the canals are not widely publicised, and that they could add an element of romance to the area's image, as well as boosting visitor numbers through canal tourism.



## **4 Strand 3 : Infrastructure**

Infrastructure was covered thoroughly in the seminars, and appeared to be a central issue among those concerned with tourism in North Staffordshire, particularly in Stoke-on-Trent.

### **4.1 Stoke-on-Trent**

Stoke-on-Trent is made up of 6 separate towns – Burslem, Fenton, Longton, Stoke, Tunstall and Hanley. It is closely neighboured by Newcastle-under-Lyme, constituting, in effect, the seventh separate town in one single urban area. This brings with it inherent infrastructure problems. One such problem is that the city does not have a clear 'centre'. While Hanley is the commercial heart of Stoke-on-Trent, Stoke's name suggests that it is the city centre. This is a cause of confusion for visitors, and entails associated problems of navigation and so on.

In spite of the problems associated with the layout of the city, many people who attended the seminars thought that the city's layout was also its unique selling point. It was suggested that the challenge lay in joining up the towns in terms of infrastructure, while allowing them to retain their individual senses of identity.

Several participants suggested a 'hub and spoke' approach to developing the city to this end. Hanley, as the commercial centre, would be the hub, and, importantly for the tourist, be further developed as the city centre.

#### **4.1.1 Transport**

Parking, signage and congestion were felt to be the main transport issues in Stoke-on-Trent.

Several participants felt that there was not enough free or paying parking in the city, and that existing parking facilities are not sufficiently close to attractors such as shops and restaurants. The Potteries Shopping Centre offers 1200 spaces, all of which are said to be full by 10.30am. The 'park and ride' system was criticised for not running often enough (every 30 minutes) and for not dropping shoppers close enough to shopping facilities.

Suggestions were made for the improvement of public transport, including the introduction of a tram, metro or monorail system. Cycle paths were also suggested as a means of easing congestion.



## 4.2 Signage

The lack of clear signage was felt by all to be a problem throughout North Staffordshire. The main signage issues raised were:

- More motorway signage to key tourist attractions needed across the area
- More city-centre signage needed in Stoke-on-Trent to facilitate tourist movement from town to town
- Signage should play a part in an area-wide branding strategy
- Gateway signage should help provide a sense of place across the County.

## 4.3 Tourist Information Centres (TICs)

Most seminar participants felt that the existing TICs perform their role well. However, the following points were made:

- TICs work too independently of one another
- Some TICs are hard to find, particularly the TIC in Stoke-on-Trent city centre
- TICs could be better positioned in transport hubs
- Not all TICs are open on Sundays
- A TIC would be useful at Alton Towers [there is one, but participants were not aware of it]
- TICs could be more accessible, e.g. free phone link from bus station.

## 4.4 Information and visitor sharing

One of the main infrastructure problems of North Staffordshire was thought to be the lack of information and visitor sharing between the varied attractions of the area. The following ideas were suggested:

- Passport / discount scheme to encourage tourists to visit more than one attraction
- Ceramics 'driving trail'
- Tourist information at key attractions about other attractions in the area, in the form of printed material or specific members of staff.



## **5 Strand 4 : Skills and Business Support**

### **5.1 Hospitality training**

Several people who attended the seminars remarked that the general level of service to tourists in the area, and especially in Stoke-on-Trent, was poor. It was agreed that better training opportunities for hospitality staff were needed, and, in turn, a higher level of service would attract more visitors to the area.



## 6 Strand 5 : Organisation

The seminar briefing paper outlined the recent changes in the organisation of tourism, highlighting the importance of Regional Development Agencies across the country. In the seminars, the following points were raised:

- Seminar participants placed a high value on a co-ordinated approach to tourism strategy in Staffordshire. They felt that this would be a means of reducing the amount of duplication of efforts to improve the area's tourism product
- Criticisms of the current organisation of the area's tourism industry included the perceived over-politicisation of tourism structures and initiatives
- It was suggested that the means of steering tourism strategy in the area could involve an executive board with specific responsibility for tourism issues
- Some participants felt that good ideas were not 'carried through' in North Staffordshire – whether the redevelopment of the Hanley bus station, a steam train from Stoke to Alton Towers, etc – and it was common for people in the industry to develop a negative attitude as a result of seeing their good ideas 'go nowhere'.



## **7 Strand 6 : Performance Measurement**

The seminar brief included an introduction to performance measurement for the tourism industry in North Staffordshire.

The view was expressed that up-to-date statistics are of vital importance at all levels. Most participants had a good knowledge of their own client-base, including visitor numbers, nationalities and ages, but did not necessarily have a broad awareness of the area's tourism performance.

A co-ordinated approach to data collection and dissemination would be welcomed.



## 8 Strand 7 : Key Projects

Seminar participants were asked to suggest key projects and products worthy of investment which would benefit the area as a whole. The following were discussed:

- Trentham Gardens: there are current plans for development including accommodation, retail, gardens and parkland
- Alton Towers: new hotel development
- Transport system improvement in Stoke-on-Trent: as detailed in Section 4.1.1
- Investment in shops, restaurants and accommodation: particularly in the heart of Stoke-on-Trent city centre
- Bring back the bottle kilns: retaining and improving the links to industrial heritage
- Install a monument in city centre: creating and enhancing awareness
- Improve Stoke-on-Trent city's architecture: with attractive new buildings which focus on quality, green public spaces (cf Sheffield), etc.