

North Staffordshire Tourism Strategy

2004-2014

Executive Summary



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Introduction

Locum Destination Consulting have been commissioned to provide a ten year strategic framework and five year action plan for tourism in North Staffordshire. This is the Executive Summary.

Since April 2003, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) now have responsibility for tourism in the regions. This is bringing great change to the pre-existing structure of Regional Tourist Boards, which has existed since 1969, many of which are being re-structured or in some cases dissolved. This change at regional level recognises the vital role now being delivered sub-regionally by local authorities and recognises that many activities are now better delivered sub-regionally. RDAs are now encouraging strategic public/private sector partnerships to deliver tourism services in a better integrated, more customer-focused way. These new partnership structures are referred to as Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) or Destination Management Partnerships (DMPs).

It is within this context that Stoke-on-Trent City Council sought approval from Advantage West Midlands (AWM) to fund a new tourism strategy in 2002. Funding of £90,000 through the Regeneration Zone was finally approved in December 2002. Following a tender process, the successful consultants, LOCUM Destination Consulting, were appointed in March 2003. A steering group detailed below oversaw the appointment of the consultants and the strategy process.

- **Jane Randall**, *Tourism Manager, Stoke-on-Trent City Council*
- **Janet Baddeley**, *Events and Marketing Officer, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council*
- **Lisa Heaton**, *Tourism and Heritage Manager, Stafford Borough Council*
- **Roger Bradshaw**, *Economic Development and Tourism Officer, Staffordshire County Council*
- **Angie Guest**, *Tourism Manager, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council*
- **Peter Johnson**, *Director, North Staffordshire Partnership*
- **Steve Beck**, *Operations Manager, North Staffordshire Partnership*
- **Graeme Whitehead**, *General Manager, The Wedgwood Visitor Centre*
- **Kevin Pugh**, *General Manager, Stoke-on-Trent Moat House Hotel*
- **Hayley Anderson**, *Advantage West Midlands*
- **Katie Foster**, *Advantage West Midlands*

The North Staffordshire Tourism Strategy has been the most comprehensive review of Tourism in North Staffordshire since the 1987 North Staffordshire Tourism Action Programme.

The process has consisted of extensive consultation and research. Consultation on the strategy began at the 2003 Staffordshire Tourism Forum on April 9th 2003 at the Wedgwood Visitor Centre. It continued with a series of consultation seminars held in June, to which over 300 individuals, businesses and organisation were invited to attend, followed by a number of one-to-one interviews. Approximately 100 people were seen as part of the consultation exercise. Over 550 businesses were contacted to take part in the SME research.

This Executive Summary has been informed by the following reports:

- **Evaluation report** July 2003
- **Consultation feedback** July 2003
- **SME research** September 2003
- **Draft strategic framework** September 2003
- **Draft action plan** December 2003
- **Final strategic framework** March 2004
- **Final action plan** March 2004

Vision: What it will be like in 2014

2.1 The Stoke-on-Trent City Region

Back in 2004, no-one wanted to use the 'place brand' of Stoke-on-Trent. It was seen as downmarket, downtrodden, incomprehensible to outsiders and uninspiring to insiders.

Ten years later, both reality and perception have changed. Like Birmingham, Newcastle/Gateshead and Glasgow before it, Stoke-on-Trent has begun to transform on the basis of very significant public and private sector investment. This is a city region where people want to live, work, invest, visit and return. Transformation has been led by a visionary champion (or more accurately a small team) who have brought about sustainable, effective urban regeneration.

The city region encompasses the urban area of Newcastle-under-Lyme, with its strong accommodation, food and drink and entertainment offer, along with the six towns of Stoke-on-Trent.

Championed by the City Council, tourism has increased its profile as a business sector, a career path and a regeneration tool. There is a strong marketing and management organisation for the city region, and private sector operators feel they can 'buy into' an organisation with vision and value.

Visitors enjoy the experience of navigating the city. The Cultural Quarter has a day-to-night buzz. Other night-time hotspots include Newcastle's bars and restaurants. Public art heralds the creative nature of the city region.

Tourism is understood as a tool and an agent of regeneration. A lively visitor economy attracts business location decision-makers, lucrative business tourism visits, and generally breeds success. At the same time, a high standard of local 'amenities', such as public parks and leisure facilities, directly attracts visitors who have friends and relatives in the city, as well as contributing to an improved 'quality of life' for residents.

Civic pride is the most crucial beneficiary of the upsurge in tourism. And in turn it creates tourism as residents invite friends and relatives to come see the 'new' Stoke-on-Trent.

The city region's star brands are ceramics, although the proportion of visitors to the city coming for factory shopping is no longer as high as 65%. Whilst the dependence of the tourism sector on this product has been reduced, ceramics brands have been integrated into and are a vital part of the 'new Stoke-on-Trent'.

Public art, sense of place, signage, gateways, legibility, connections - these issues were seen as crucial to the agenda of 'Marketing Stoke-on-Trent', and given early priority and investment.

Other visible changes include the revitalisation of Burslem, where factory shops, Ceramica, the ceramic and craft market, walking trails, cafés and an active events programme draw visitors.

In the City Centre, the museum and archive redevelopment has yielded an iconic building, the retail offer has been enhanced, a new bus station and TIC are functioning, development partnerships have been formed to take advantage of hotel and residential investment opportunities, and the arts and culture offer has never been stronger. It now feels like a high quality, vibrant city centre.





Within the urban core, several world-known brands and their visitor facilities continue to draw and disperse visitors to other attractions in the area. Trentham is playing a role as a destination attraction. These brands contribute to the strength of the Stoke-on-Trent *city region* brand in the marketplace.

The design and innovation theme has emerged as a key driver across North Staffordshire. Tourism-related projects have featured heavily and will continue to do so: a Design Centre, festivals / events, corporate showcase developments, etc. Although there is some geographic spread, these are primarily urban activities and messages, and therefore have contributed to the gradual strengthening of the Stoke-on-Trent *city region* brand.

Importantly, the regeneration of the city has had beneficial spin-offs for the surrounding rural area, in providing first class facilities - theatre, entertainment, restaurants, shopping etc - for residents as well as visitors, and creating pride in the city beyond its boundaries.

Stoke-on-Trent is also becoming a green city, connected with the countryside and waterways - not only in design and provision of public spaces but also in the development of a sustainable non-car public transport system within and connecting to the city.

2.2 Rural North Staffordshire

North Staffordshire's rural areas and market towns are thriving. Product development and enhancement has focused around the themes of family fun, outdoor activities, heritage and local food and drink. A number of 'hidden gems' have been uncovered and promoted within each of these themes. The emphasis is on quality and higher-value offers and on encouraging overnight stays. The Staffordshire Short Breaks campaign continues to yield benefits across the county and particularly encourages the capture of further benefit from Alton Towers visitors.

Leek has emerged as gateway to the *Peak District*, and has benefited from enhancements within the Market Towns Initiative. It is known as a shopping centre for antiques with a modern design twist. Visitors seek out All Saints Church and other architectural gems, particularly with Arts & Crafts associations. They eat and drink in local restaurants and tea shops, and stay in hotels, of the highest quality.

Other market towns including Biddulph, Stone and Cheadle are also benefiting from improvements. Cheadle is emerging as a service centre for Alton Towers - providing accommodation, eating/drinking places, information, etc.

Other 'gems' attracting a similar market are Biddulph Grange, Rudyard Lake (recently refurbished and offering a 'step back in time' day out) and of course the attractions of the *Peak District*.

The heritage, culture and food and drink offers of Stafford and surrounding areas have developed in conjunction with Lichfield and other destinations in the south of the county, particularly through the Creative Staffordshire and Taste of Staffordshire initiatives.

For the family market, Alton Towers and surrounding tourism businesses have re-invested in their product and strengthened their joint offers. Compared to ten years ago, a higher proportion of Alton Towers visitors stay overnight in Staffordshire, and visit other attractions within the county relating to wildlife and outdoor activities.

Strategic Framework

3.1 Making the Step Change

To achieve the step change implied in the vision for 2014 will require investment, effort and belief on the part of local, sub-regional, county and regional organisations. Important stages of the process of developing this strategy have involved the identification of champions and key partners, and the development by key players of a solid foundation for this period of change.

In support of the vision for the *city region* set out above, marketing of Stoke-on-Trent needs to be closely aligned with promotion for the purposes of inward investment and regeneration. The 'Marketing and Selling the City' group is developing a City Marketing Strategy, and proposals for a Stoke-on-Trent Destination Management Organisation are also being considered.

There will also be a destination management partnership at county level, which takes a leading role in the promotion of the county of *Staffordshire* as a visitor destination, focusing on its unique and distinctive offer (and on key attractions such as Alton Towers, Shugborough, etc). Close joint working between Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire organisations is essential, and the more detailed development of destination management partnership structures will reflect this.

Staffordshire Moorlands will continue to enhance its role as a sub brand within the *Peak District*, whilst participating fully in the Staffordshire Destination Management Partnership.

3.2 Strategic Framework for The Stoke-on-Trent City Region

Key Principles

- Design, innovation and marketing are core values; 'made in Stoke-on-Trent' is a quality hallmark
- Celebrate the world class brands that the city is home to and build on their brand values
- Focus on creating a high quality city centre
- Aim high - don't accept second best

Marketing and Branding

- Destination marketing aimed at visitors should not be separated from that aimed at residents or inward investors
- The highest priority in the short-term is to enhance local pride in the *city region* and its products
- The ceramics industry gives the *city region* several star brands whose existing value should be harnessed, particularly for visitors from further afield. The city has 310 ceramic companies, many of whom have visitor facilities
- However it is essential that a contemporary take on the ceramics industry is featured, connecting with the overarching design theme

Attractors and Key Projects

- The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery/Library and Archive redevelopment will help build a critical mass of attractions in the city centre, and enhance the 'destination' created by the Cultural Quarter
- Wedgwood is developing proposals for a museum on its site
- The North Staffordshire Design Initiative (in partnership with Staffordshire University) has proposed an International Centre of Design housed in an iconic building, an idea strongly supported by the county





- A festival of design and creativity has also been proposed and could be developed in conjunction with the International Centre of Design
- Greening for Growth will significantly improve the image and experience of the *city region* and create a series of new experiences
- Public art - closely connected with the ceramic industry or other local products - will enhance the cityscape, establish gateways and routes, and help create a 'sense of place' (cf. Gaudi Park in Barcelona)
- An indoor market in Burslem will showcase the continuing creativity of the ceramics industry and applied arts
- Trentham (formerly known as Trentham Gardens) will create a major leisure destination with thematic links into the urban core and outwards to the gardens and landscapes of the *county*
- The canal system merits enhancement and attention as an attractor for visitors and residents, particularly in the context of Festival Park
- Newcastle-under-Lyme is developing its already popular town centre market
- Events programming (in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent) is a significant area of development for the *city region* - encompassing sports, cultural, business and other events - and should be a key plank of the image-building work undertaken by the 'Marketing and Selling the City' group

Infrastructure

- Making the city legible and navigable for visitors is very high priority
- Additional quality parking is needed in the city centre and other key locations
- Public transport provision and information for tourists needs significant improvement - from the City Centre bus station redevelopment to dedicated tourist routes built around ceramics attractions
- A Park and Ride proposal should be considered
- The City Centre Tourist Information Centre needs relocation in the 'heart' of the city, as well as being supported by additional Tourist Information Points
- North Staffordshire needs to be part of an integrated Destination Management System (DMS) for Staffordshire

Supporting Tourism Businesses

- The key challenge is encouraging businesses to take up the support available to them - and this is particularly difficult in urban areas where awareness of being 'tourism' businesses is minimal. The strategy is to work closely with the Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support to help develop focused programmes which will address the needs of tourism businesses in North Staffordshire.

3.3 Strategic Framework for Rural North Staffordshire

Key Principles

- Ensure that the Staffordshire Moorlands fully capitalises on the Peak District brand
- Prioritise sustainability and eco-development
- Make the most of Alton Towers
- Promote local food and drink through 'Taste of Staffordshire' and other initiatives



Marketing and Branding

- *Staffordshire* is the primary brand for promoting the attractions of the county, although Staffordshire Moorlands will be promoted as an integral part of both *Staffordshire* and the *Peak District*
- Alton Towers currently dominates the Staffordshire Short Break campaign - to beneficial effect - and this 'star brand' should be supported and enhanced in its relationship to the wider *county* brand
- Key themes for the *county* are heritage (including canals and steam railways), outdoor activities, food and drink, landscape and environment

Attractors and Key Projects

- A gateway project and streetscape improvements in Leek will enhance the relationship of the *county* to the *Peak District*
- The Three Dales Vision (although within Newcastle-under-Lyme and therefore the geographic *city region*) picks up on some of the key themes for the *county* and further work is needed to determine whether this vision is viable as a tourist destination; Apedale Heritage Centre represents an emerging attraction with particular appeal to the VFR market and local residents
- Trentham (in Stafford Borough) will create a major leisure destination with thematic links into the urban core and outwards to the gardens and landscapes of the *county*
- Star attractions such as Shugborough continue to bring in significant numbers of visitors, and also play host to an increasing number of profile-raising events
- The Great British Kitchen will be an important project for Stafford if it progresses
- Significant new conference facilities in Stafford Borough, on the periphery of the *city region* in Newcastle-under-Lyme, and across the border in Cheshire are increasing the county's business tourism offer
- Creative Industries and the Creative County programme link with key themes (including design and innovation) for the Stoke-on-Trent *city region*
- Co-ordinated programming of festivals and events across the county (and with neighbours)

Infrastructure

- Tourist Information Centres within the *county* and beyond (esp. *Peak District* TICs such as Buxton) need co-ordination and attention to the presentation of the *Staffordshire* offer
- Need county boundary signs to help create a sense of place
- North Staffordshire needs to be part of an integrated Destination Management System for Staffordshire

Organisation

A County Destination Management Partnership is evolving from the current work of Staffordshire Tourism (County Council). It is important that the DMP actively engages key public and private sector organisations as well as support agencies, and that it is sufficiently funded in order to make a real difference in terms of delivering improved products, servicing the industry's needs and marketing and brand awareness.

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Implementing the Strategy: Key Issues

4.1 Shared Priorities

Exhibit 1: *Priorities for North Staffordshire*

	Stoke-on-Trent	Newcastle	Stafford	Moorlands
Attractors	Ceramics	Food & Drink	Shugborough	Alton Towers
Key Projects	City Centre	Market	Trentham; GBK	Leek Gateway
Marketing and Branding	Marketing and Selling the City		Staffordshire	Staffordshire / Peak
Organisation	SoT City Region / Staffordshire		Staffordshire	Staffordshire / Peak
Infrastructure	Public Art / signage		signage / information	
Performance Measurement	Investment / quality		overnights	
Skills & Business Support	Work with Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support; quality initiatives			

4.2 Working with Southern Staffordshire

The North Staffordshire Tourism Action Plan includes a number of projects which represent shared priorities with Southern Staffordshire as expressed in the Southern Staffordshire Visitor Economy Strategy:

- Destination Management System
- Destination branding and marketing
- Gateway initiatives
- Canal product development
- Improving accommodation provision
- Developing and marketing events and festivals

Key attractors in Stafford Borough are not featured in the North Staffordshire action plan due to greater synergy with the key themes of the Southern Staffordshire Visitor Economy Strategy.

4.3 Supporting Programmes

Working closely with Advantage West Midlands, the Regional Tourism Agency and the Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support, North Staffordshire destination management partners will develop locally-relevant interventions in the following areas:

- Business support
- Quality assurance
- Workforce development
- Visitor information
- Hotel development





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4.4 Hotel Development

The most important indicator of success in North Staffordshire will be an increase in bednights. Currently the vast majority of North Staffordshire's visitors are day visitors to the sub-region. It must be seen as a high priority to reverse this trend.

There are a number of hotel sites available - mainly in Radial Park and Etruria Valley. The site at Stoke-on-Trent railway station has potential as a conference hotel. Wedgwood and Trentham (formerly Trentham Gardens) present flagship hotel prospects. The redevelopment of Stoke-on-Trent City Centre calls for the identification of hotel sites within the Cultural Quarter.

Action Plan Programmes

The North Staffordshire Tourism Action Plan sets out detailed actions to be undertaken by named partners, under the following headings.

5.1 Organisational Development

To establish a Staffordshire Destination Management Partnership (DMP) as part of a regional network. Staffordshire DMP will also need to work in partnership with Peak District, National Forest, Derbyshire and other neighbours.

To establish a Stoke-on-Trent city region Destination Management Organisation (DMO) integrating visitor management and marketing with other city management and place marketing functions.

5.2 Showcasing Ceramics

To use world-class ceramics brands to support the Stoke-on-Trent brand, marketing and offer. Focus on developing 'made in Stoke-on-Trent' as a quality hallmark.

To focus on ceramics clusters in Longton and Burslem. Develop visitor management strategies, information and interpretation to encourage visitors to stay longer in the area, and especially to explore on foot.

To work with partners to develop flagship projects including the International Design Centre and Ceramics Festival.



5.3 Developing Market Towns

To support the development of key North Staffordshire market towns, positioning the market towns as attractive destinations and gateways to the countryside / Alton Towers.

To enhance the provision of tourist information services, town centre management, visitor management and interpretation.

Existing strengths in Festivals and Events (e.g. Newcastle-under-Lyme's 'in Bloom' titles) will be harnessed and best practice shared.

5.4 The City Centre

To invest in creating a holistic visitor offer in the city centre linked with the Cultural Quarter, which presents the Stoke-on-Trent city brand. To make this a gateway to the rest of the city (and county) offer, and to set a very high standard for the quality of urban design and the visitor experience.

5.5 Parks, Gardens and Waterways

To connect urban North Staffordshire with the sub-region's strong countryside offer, through urban parks and canalside development.

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Delivering the Action Plan

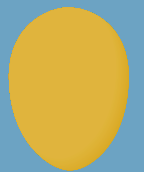


To achieve the step change required by the vision for tourism in 2014 will require investment, effort and belief on the part of local, sub-regional, county and regional organisations.

Important stages of the strategy process have involved the identification of champions and key partners, and the development by key players of a solid foundation for a period of change.

This action plan is about practical steps towards delivering the step change. The programmes outlined here must be flexible and respond to changing circumstances, but the imperative to take bold actions in partnership will remain.

Staffordshire County Council, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stafford Borough and Staffordshire Moorlands District have worked with Stoke-on-Trent to steer and develop this action plan for North Staffordshire. These partners will continue to update and monitor its progress.



The North Staffordshire Tourism Strategy has been funded by Advantage West Midlands through the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone

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