

AYRSHIRE REGIONAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD

MEETING – 29th JANUARY 2021

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF INVESTMENT & GROWTH, NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SUBJECT: AYRSHIRE TOURISM ACTION PLAN

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To inform Members of the development of the Ayrshire Tourism Action Plan (Appendix 1) that sets out short-term actions to support and enable the tourism sector and the Ayrshire destination to recover and rebuild its visitor economy.
2. This report requests that Members ratify the implementation of the short-term measures of the Ayrshire Tourism Action Plan to be co-delivered by the private and public sector members of the Ayrshire Visitor Economy Strategic Sub-Group.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. It is recommended that Members note the level of partnership and joint working that has taken place by the visitor economy sector and public sector partners to address sectoral recovery and renewal by developing a new Tourism Action Plan for Ayrshire and a regional-wide collaborative working approach.
4. It is recommended that Members ratify the implementation of the short-term delivery measures of the Ayrshire Tourism Action Plan and agree to support the development of a medium- and longer-term Tourism Action Plan to secure the future of the Ayrshire visitor economy.

INTRODUCTION

5. The Ayrshire Tourism Action Plan sets out destination and sector priorities through short term actions that have been identified through sector research and consultation with partners and industry.

The plan enables private and public sector partners to deliver short-term actions to support industry recovery from the Covid19 pandemic, to work towards the formation of a regional tourism collaboration, and a medium to longer-term strategic action plan to reboot sector growth through a destination development approach.

The action plan is an evolving document which sets out a commitment to collective action that benefits sector recovery and a return to sustainable growth, which will be reviewed and updated as progress is made, and the regional collaboration is formed.

KEY POINTS

6. The delivery of activity within the action plan is vital to the continued success of the collaborative approach. A key component for success is the growth of industry engagement and participation across the region. It is the ambition of this approach that tourism businesses across all three local authority areas will come together as a powerful, influential industry voice and will re-position Ayrshire as a more competitive, significant tourism destination in Scotland. It also presents a united industry front to aid recovery from the effects of the pandemic on individual businesses by strengthening the destination and tourism community.
7. Working in collaboration will significantly strengthen Ayrshire's proposition, embedding the visitor economy as part of the Ayrshire Regional Economic Partnership Vision and integrating with wider Ayrshire Growth Deal priorities, Community Wealth Building, regeneration ambitions and localised priorities and plans.
8. Tourism has a considerable impact on community wellbeing and inclusion that plays a role in tackling poverty and equality. A commitment to Ayrshire's 'Community Wealth Building' approach will be embedded into the development, planning and delivery of tourism in Ayrshire to ensure communities and businesses benefit from tourism directly by encouraging spend locally and supporting local supply chains.
9. The Ayrshire Tourism Action Plan has been co-produced with industry, partners and led by Scottish Enterprise. The plan has been informed by the findings of the State of the Nation Covid19 Research, business and stakeholder consultation.
10. The Action Plan will focus on 4 key workstreams. These include:
 - Tourism Collaboration - establishment of a collaborative arrangement to provide direction and help embed the visitor economy in the region's wider place-based aspirations.
 - Marketing - development of a cohesive marketing plan for the entire region which will attract visitors and strengthen the proposition.
 - Asset Building - building upon the area's existing destination assets in the shape of products, services and experiences and identifying ways by which the offering can be further enhanced and strengthened through collaboration and innovation to attract more visitors to the region.

- Digital - fully exploiting the opportunities arising through digital development to showcase Ayrshire as an ambitious, forward thinking region which embraces the opportunities presented by data and leading technologies.

PROGRAMME RISKS

11. A strategic and operational risk register will be developed for all Ayrshire Visitor Economy activities including the development of regional collaboration and action planning. A risk register will be a key element of the decision-making process, ensuring that potential benefits and risks are fully understood before actions are authorised and that measures to mitigate risk are established.
12. The main strategic risks relate to the impact of Covid19 and the consequence of the of Brexit on the sector. Operational delays to the development of the collaboration and successful regional industry engagement present adverse impacts on the delivery of a new vision, strategy and jointly delivered longer term action plan.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

13. There are currently no legal implications arising from this report.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

14. There are currently no human resource implications arising from this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

15. The financial implications arising from this report are covered in the action plan. Funding to deliver short to medium term actions has been secured from a variety of external sources. Staff resources from VisitScotland, Local Authorities and Scottish Enterprise have been provided to support joint working arrangements. The private sector has dedicated time and resource to supporting the development of a collaboration, business engagement and assisting in the delivery of the action plan. At this stage no further financial implications are expected.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

16. Project leads will complete an Equality Impact Assessment for the Tourism Action Plan and work with Local authority Equalities Officers to ensure the plan is compliant.

17. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ayrshire Tourism Action Plan 2021 (Short-term priorities)

Background Papers:

Executive Oversight Group: Ayrshire Tourism Progress Report

Members requiring further information should contact:

Karen Yeomans, North Ayrshire Council, Growth & Investment
kyeomans@north-ayrshire.gov.uk

Implementation Officer:

Kathleen Dow, North Ayrshire Council, Growth & Investment
kdow@north-ayrshire.gov.uk

Ayrshire Visitor Economy - Short-term Strategic Action Plan 2020/2021

Introduction

The purpose of this plan is to enable Ayrshire's tourism private and public sector partners to deliver short-term actions to support industry recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and work towards the formation of a regional tourism collaboration and a longer-term strategic action plan to reboot sector growth.

The plan will be an evolving document which sets out a commitment to collective action that will benefit sector recovery and its return to sustainable growth and will be reviewed and updated as progress is made and the regional collaboration is formed.

Background

This draft Action Plan will lead activity towards an Ayrshire Regional Partnership and contribute towards the key priorities outlined within the Scotland Outlook 2030 Strategy – Our Thriving Places, Our Passionate People, Our Diverse Businesses and Our Memorable Experiences. It supports the aims and objectives that will be further defined in the wider Ayrshire Visitor Economy Strategic Action Plan 2020 – 2025: Survival, Recovery, Renewal and Growth.

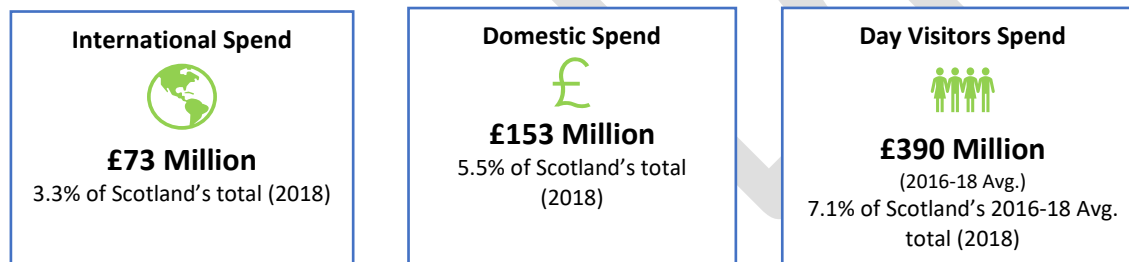
The contents outline key, short-term headline deliverables and their proposed timeframe for delivery over an initial period up to April 2021. In order to keep these headline activities at an achievable level, a maximum of five are assigned under each workstream area – Tourism Collaboration, Marketing, Digital and Asset Building (Products, Services & Experiences).

Context

Tourism plays a key role in Scotland's economy, with overnight visitors generating in excess of £4.5bn annually and day visitors contributing a further £6.2bn, giving a total spend close to £11bn. The industry accounts for over 200,000 jobs – many in rural areas, helping less populous communities to prosper – across 20,000 different tourism-related businesses, while also feeding into other sectors such as food and drink, retail, transport and construction.

Tourism has a considerable impact on community wellbeing and inclusion that plays a role in tackling poverty and equality. A commitment to Ayrshire's 'Community Wealth Building' approach will be embedded into the development and planning of tourism in Ayrshire to ensure communities and businesses benefit from tourism directly by encouraging spend locally and supporting local supply chains.

Ayrshire's Visitor Economy is a key driver of economic growth within the region. Tourism generates a direct economic impact of over £355 million and a total economic impact of over £470 million. The industry supports 13,500 full-time equivalent jobs and welcomes 4.18 million visitors a year.



Total visitor spend can be broken down further to International visitors, domestic overnight visitors and day visitors as shown in the graphics here. It is well connected to the Central Belt of Scotland and benefits from good connectivity by road, rail and sea. However, Ayrshire's diverse geography, crossing both urban and rural landscapes, presents challenges resulting from a fragmented tourism proposition. To date, the region has struggled to maximise the opportunities that the sector can present through increased employment, attraction of investment and improved health and wellbeing.

International visitor spend is significantly outstripped by domestic and day visitor spend compared to average spend across Scotland. However, it is fair to say that a very small number of international visitors are making a significant economic impact in terms of spend in the region (VisitScotland Factsheet 2018).

As an area, Ayrshire's tourism proposition is hugely varied but also fragmented. The product and experience mix differs across the region. Now, more than ever, there is an opportunity for businesses to work in collaborative way to help support the recovery of the sector across the region. In the past, Ayrshire's local authorities have traditionally promoted the businesses within their particular area and, while that has produced mixed success, there is now a recognition that there is greater strength in working collaboratively with public sector partners and stakeholders as a whole to build a stronger proposition and attract a larger market share.

Ayrshire Visitor Economy Strategic Group

Ayrshire Regional Economic Partnership have identified the visitor economy as a key sector of potential growth for Ayrshire and set up a group – the Ayrshire Visitor Economy Strategic Group, chaired by Visit Scotland's Malcolm Roughead, to develop and grow Ayrshire's tourism and hospitality sector.

The Ayrshire Visitor Economy Strategic Group (AVESG), its private and public sector partners and stakeholders commit to an agreed industry-led approach to supporting and delivering the actions outlined in this plan. A significant amount of work has been achieved to date by the Workstream Sub-Groups, which provides the basis for this draft action plan.

As the widespread effects of COVID-19 continue to affect us in various ways, we now have an opportunity to redress the status quo and actively plan for the recovery of a sector which has been impacted in the most devastating way.

AVESG commissioned State of the Nation – Post Covid19 Economic Recovery (*Business Pointer, November 2020*) research during Sept/Oct 2020. Fifty Ayrshire business were interviewed and a key outcome is that to facilitate recovery businesses believe Ayrshire needs to develop a regional collaborative approach that focuses on destination marketing, product/experience development and digital adoption to address the impact of the crisis in the long-term. Businesses indicated a need for:

- Destination development by collaboration – industry-led with public sector partners working together
- Industry engagement and participation plan – communications planning to strengthen industry representation/voice
- Audit of Ayrshire product/experience – leading to;
- Market review and competitive environment analysis to identify key opportunities for businesses to develop new products and destination marketing to capture new markets
- Businesses highlighted luxury, green/sustainable and responsible tourism as products of interest that are so far untapped
- Cohesive regional destination marketing and promotion to competitively position Ayrshire and shift its image

The group provides the leadership required to improve Ayrshire's tourism offering by developing a programme of industry-led activity.

Under the AVESG, four workstream areas have been established to date which aim to galvanise thinking, provide a common focus and generate traction.

These include:

- **Tourism Collaboration** - establishment of a partnership arrangement to provide direction and help embed the visitor economy in the region's wider place-based aspirations.
- **Marketing** - development of a cohesive marketing and communications plan for the entire region which will attract visitors and strengthen the proposition, as well as delivering proposed activity to inform and encourage participation from tourism businesses across the wider region.

- **Asset Building** - building upon the area's existing assets in the shape of products, services and experiences and identifying ways by which the offering can be further enhanced and strengthened through collaboration and innovation to attract more visitors to the region.
- **Digital** - fully exploiting the opportunities arising through digital development to showcase Ayrshire as an ambitious, forward thinking region which embraces the opportunities presented by data and leading technologies.

While delivery of activity within these areas will be vital to the success of the approach, a key component for success will be growing industry engagement and participation across the region. It is the ambition of this approach that tourism businesses across all three local authority areas and the islands come together to present a united front in order to recover from the devastating effects of the pandemic on the individual businesses - and support the recovery of the industry across the wider region.

Working in collaboration will significantly strengthen Ayrshire's proposition, embedding the visitor economy as part of the Ayrshire Regional Economic Partnership Vision and integrating with wider Ayrshire Growth Deal priorities, Community Wealth Building, regeneration ambitions and localised priorities and plans.

The identified short-term actions to April 2021 (timescale to be revised) are outlined under each workstream area below.

Actions have now been prioritised. Those with imminent actions are coloured as green and those with actions dependent on decisions or considered to be progressing after March are coloured yellow.

TOURISM COLLABORATION WORKSTREAM**Objective:**

To establish a structured collaborative approach, focusing on the management of tourism activity across the region.

HEADLINE ACTIVITY	IMPLEMENTATION	LEAD PARTNER (s)	TIMELINE & BUDGET (S/M/L)
C.1: Inform the purpose, mission and approach to establish the partnership arrangement	C.1.1. Identification of roles, remits and resource (people and financial) C.1.2. Scope/define a charter or collaborative agreement between the public and private sector C.1.3 Develop strategic visioning and collaborative model and define strategic actions.	A Dobson and others TBC	£10k
C.2: Ayrshire and Arran Tourism Workshop actions	C.1.1. Identify and progress outcomes from two workshop sessions (facilitated by Terry Stevens and led by Alastair Dobson). Insight from these sessions will be used to inform the purpose (what) and mission (how) elements contributing towards the development of an approach structure. C.1.2. Use the workshop outcomes to identify, inform and define the medium to long-term priorities.	A Dobson	
C.3: Coalesce and engage with industry and stakeholders across the Region.	C.3.1. Engagement with partner (LAs/VS) leads to identify the tourism businesses (who) within each area for B2B communication and engagement purposes (see also M.3.2)	A.Dobson/LAs	
C.4: Scoping of Demonstrator Pilot Projects	C.4.1. Discussion and agreement around potential pilot projects	A.Dobson/LAs	
C.5: Define success across all workstreams	C.5.1. Identify key performance indicators for medium to long term priorities	Steering Panel (sub-group)	

MARKETING WORKSTREAM**Objective:**

The primary objective of the group is to market the region to attract visitors during winter/spring as a matter of urgency. The three local authorities pooling their resources in a joined-up destination approach has more impact for the region as a whole, as the consumer does not differentiate. For the sake of expediency, this should build on the momentum from existing campaigns using existing platforms.

HEADLINE ACTIVITY	IMPLEMENTATION	LEAD PARTNER (s)	TIMELINE & BUDGET (S/M/L)
M.1: Winter into Spring Marketing (underway / scheduled)	M.1.1. Deliver agreed 'Make it Yours' social campaign	The Coig / 3 LAs	Mar – May 2021 / £3-4k
	M.1.2. Deliver 4 seasonal blogs to inspire planning/visits	The Coig	Feb – Apr 2021 / IKS
	M.1.3. Deliver paid social ads driving towards seasonal blogs	VS	Mar – Apr / £10k
	M.1.4. Deliver media partnership with Hearst Magazines	VS	Mar – Apr / £25k
M.2: Agreement over branding and regional positioning	M.2.1. Consensus required around brand proposition and associated requirements in line with regional positioning (see D.3)	Marketing Sub-Group	Estimated £20k
M.3: Deliver 12-month collaborative marketing campaign focusing on the destination, including videography/photography, promotion of wellness and natural assets.	M.3.1. Confirmation of match grant funding to commence campaign	Marketing Sub-Group	Mar 2021 / £80k grant funding sourced
	M.3.2. Industry and stakeholder engagement in delivery to ensure broad regional benefits		
M.4: Effectively communicate B2B delivery underway and proposed activities to inform and encourage wider business participation and engagement.	M.1.1. Development of a Communications Plan	Marketing Sub Group	Feb 2021
	M.1.2. Delivery of agreed communications activity	Marketing Sub Group	Feb 2021

DIGITAL WORKSTREAM**Objective:**

To harness the power of technology and data to drive ambition around new and innovative digital opportunities for the Ayrshire region.

HEADLINE ACTIVITY	IMPLEMENTATION	LEAD PARTNER (s)	TIMELINE & BUDGET (S/M/L)
D.1: Digital Business Support	<p>D.1.1. Continued engagement with VS and Business Gateway around delivery of range of digital support mechanisms to help increase engagement in the region. This will help to address bookability challenges which remains low (an estimated 49% of accommodation providers providing online booking facilities). Key areas of focus include accommodation, experiences and transport.</p> <p>D.1.2. Promote Digital Reviews delivered via VS Industry Relationship Manager.</p> <p>D.1.3. Feasibility around engaging a project resource to support Ayrshire businesses to utilise and mitigate barriers to the adoption of digital technology in their companies.</p> <p>D.1.3. Link to existing conversations with SE to further develop a regional approach to business support for Ayrshire tourism companies (see A.5.2).</p>	VS	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Dec 2020 Dec/Jan 2021</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
D.2: Travel Tech Project	<p>D.2.1. Continue engagement with Travel Tech Scotland to identify and exploit the opportunities emerging from data-driven innovation and technology such as sensors, mobile solutions and data dashboards to help manage visitor activity.</p> <p>D.2.2. Investigation into data sharing across the region to inform decision-making.</p> <p>D.2.3. Link Sentiment Analysis intelligence gathered through VS to the data driven activity (D2.2)</p> <p>D.2.3. Delivery of a pilot workshop for key Ayrshire businesses to assess data priorities, current assets and encourage participation.</p> <p>D.2.4. Wider consultation across the Tourism Collaboration to share ideas emerging from the Travel Tech Project.</p>	VS/The Coig	<p>Ongoing £5k</p> <p>Jan 2021 Ongoing</p> <p>Jan/Feb 2021 £5k Mar 2021</p>
D.3: Reposition Ayrshire	D.4.1. Auditing of existing and proposed messaging across stakeholders and partners using digital technology to focus and co-ordinate the partnership efforts. To be undertaken in conjunction with Marketing Workstream tasks.	VS and Marketing Workstream	Feb 2021
D.4: Smart Tourism Destination - Tourism Pilot Digital Project	D.3.1 Build upon wider pan sector ambitions to grow and develop digital capabilities linked to the Ayrshire Growth Deal and drive change across the region. Engage across the various Regional Partnership digital workstreams (eg. efficiency and productivity) to develop a pilot project positioning Ayrshire as a Smart Tourism Destination in line with the wider Ayrshire digital planning. This activity will maximise opportunity around resource and support, while embedding the visitor economy ambitions across the wider regional delivery.	LAs/REP Digital Workstream	Yet to be investigated

ASSET BUILDING (PRODUCTS, SERVICES & EXPERIENCES) WORKSTREAM

Objective:

To focus on the development of our assets, products and services which further enhance and benefit the regional offering.

HEADLINE ACTIVITY	IMPLEMENTATION	LEAD PARTNER (s)	TIMELINE & BUDGET (S/M/L)
A.1: Secure/obtain direction of travel from the Tourism Collaboration workstream Steering Panel	A.1.1. Building upon the success of activity delivered to date, engage in discussions with the Tourism Collaboration to shape the role of the Asset Building workstream in line with the vision in order to attract more/new visitors to the region.	Steering Panel	Feb 2021
A.2: Pan-Ayrshire Product Audit	A.2.1. further discussion and clarity required around the recommendations of the Audit and agreement around identified opportunities and gaps/areas for improvement to be progressed. A.2.2. Undertake a review of planned events across the region to inform a programme as part of the regional recovery A.2.3. Consensus and agreement around opportunity areas to be progressed and further developed as part of the Tourism Collaboration.	SE LAs (N.Ayrshire lead) Steering Panel	Mar 2021
A.3: Research into new market opportunities	A.3.1. Commission research to fully explore new market segments and opportunity areas where a need for these has been identified in A.2.3. which will focus future investment and maximise the contribution to wider regional economic and community development. (ie Food Tourism/Responsible Tourism Research)	SE/LAs	Timescale to be agreed £10k
A.4: Delivery of new opportunity areas	A.3.1. Engagement with existing partner and stakeholder mechanisms to support the implementation of new activity. A.3.2. Build upon existing conversations to further develop a regional approach to business support for Ayrshire tourism companies and, where necessary, identify areas where addition support is required. A.3.3. Engagement with wider partners to fully exploit new opportunities identified (ie. Food & Drink Regional Group, Zero Waste Scotland)	SE/LAs	Timescales dependent on A.1.
A.5: Build upon extensive efforts to date in encouraging regional engagement and collaboration	A.5.1. Engage with each local authority's tourism partner to identify the key tourism businesses and emerging talent within their area to ensure they are included in communications. A.5.2. Align with the Marketing workstream to disseminate customer insights around regional offering based on existing knowledge, profiles and insights (baseline - who are the customers and what do customers want?). A.5.3. Identify and agree a small number of short-term activities for implementation with tourism businesses across each local authority to raise awareness, encourage involvement and participation, share knowledge and increase collaboration across the wider region. (TIS Guide? Talking Heads? Pride & Passion?)	LAs SE/VS SE/LAs	Timescales dependent on A.1.