

## MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

<b>TO:</b> Cabinet	<b>REPORT NUMBER:</b> <b>MCa/22/54</b>
<b>FROM:</b> Cllr. Harry Richardson– Cabinet Member for Economic Development	<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b> 06/03/2023
<b>OFFICER:</b> Fiona Duhamel, Director – Economic Growth and Climate Change	<b>KEY DECISION REF NO.</b> CAB370

### BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK CULTURE, HERITAGE AND VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Members on the development of the Councils' first Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy Strategy.
- 1.2 To adopt the Strategy on the basis it provides a clear vision and set of priorities which will build the confidence of Mid Suffolk as a cultural, heritage and visitor destination, securing and growing the sustainability and resilience of these sectors for the benefit of residents and the economy.

#### 2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Do nothing, but these sectors which have already been hugely impacted by the pandemic will continue to suffer and struggle to progress and develop.
- 2.2 Encompass a review of this sector within the emerging Economic Strategy rather than commission a separate piece of work. It was felt that this sector has specific opportunities, strengths and challenges that warrant the development of a tailored, specific strategy.

#### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy Strategy, attached as Appendix 1, is adopted and that Members endorse the clear long-term vision and accompanying set of ambitions, aims and objectives set out in this strategy
- 3.2 The Director for Economic Growth & Climate Change, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member, be delegated authority to make amendments and updates to the Strategy, in response to changing needs.
- 3.3 The Director for Economic Growth & Climate Change, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member, be delegated authority to develop a delivery plan to be completed by June 2023.

#### REASON FOR DECISION

**That the Council has a clear strategy and delivery plan to set the ambition to shape the future growth and resilience of the Cultural, Heritage and Visitor Economy sectors across the districts and to provide a prospectus for conversations about future investment with national and regional funders.**

## **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 Mid Suffolk District Council believes that cultural, heritage and visitor economy infrastructure supports the creation of places in which people want to live, work and visit, and recognises these sectors as a driver for growth, investment, and wellbeing.
- 4.2 The Council's ambition is to work with partners to use culture to improve health and wellbeing, understand the innovative partnerships that can be created between cultural providers and educational institutions, recognise the uniqueness of our heritage connections including constable country and wool towns, and celebrate new attractions being planned and major public and private investment heralding significant opportunities for the economy.
- 4.3 The Council recently undertook a peer review challenge which identified that we need to create compelling place narratives for the districts, highlighting the unique selling points of each place. This strategy will be a key part of that activity through helping to identify and distil the unique cultural, heritage and visitor economy attributes for specific geographies within the district.
- 4.4 In order to deliver on these ambitions, the Council, alongside Babergh District Council, jointly agreed to develop our first comprehensive culture, heritage, and visitor economy strategy to clearly set out our ambitions over the next 10 years.

## **5. STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT**

- 5.1 Creative Tourist (CT) Ltd were appointed in September 2022 to support the Council with the development of this Strategy.
- 5.2 Their approach has been as follows:
- Step 1 – scoping and researching – defining the scale and scope of the development project.
  - Step 2 – engaging and testing – exploring issues and building engagement through consultation and critical thinking; test the pillars of the strategy – its themes and strategic priorities.
  - Step 3 – prioritising and defining – developing the aspirations and values into a strategy and action plan; taking ownership by creating a route map.
- 5.3 The strategy development process has been open and flexible, factoring in influencing factors that may not have been present when the original brief was created in June 2022, e.g., cost-of-living crisis, further changes in government (policy), post-pandemic funding, other major local authority strategies to align with, and so on.
- 5.4 The research, consultation and analysis phase was conducted between October and December 2022. One-to-one consultations were conducted with representatives from a variety of culture, creative, tourism and other sectors and this is set out in more detail in the Stakeholder Engagement & Consultation update in section 11 below.
- 5.5 Additionally, extensive desk research has been undertaken to build the picture of existing documents, strategies, data and evidence relating to past and current initiatives led by Mid Suffolk District Council, alongside those of other relevant agencies and organisations. This has built a picture of strengths and opportunities in a local, county and regional context.

## **6. KEY OUTPUTS FROM THE STRATEGY**

6.1 The vision and emerging themes set out below are still being sense checked with our internal and external stakeholder groups and may to be refined before the final strategy is published.

6.2 The Consultants have developed a draft Vision statement which strikes a balance between local residents, businesses and organisations and the visitor economy which should be complementary to communities, supporting the economy & local services:

“set in a landscape of enduring inspiration, we will work together to create distinctive, welcoming, and vital cultural places and experiences that energise our communities, our enterprises and our visitors to embrace the progressive heart of Suffolk.”

6.3 Three themes that help to frame the scale, scope and ambition of the Strategy have been drafted, these are:

**Theme 1 - Building cultural habits – improving the everyday experience of residents and visitors.**

**Theme 2.1 - Accelerating progress – developing the sector and its resilience**

**Theme 2.2 - Accelerating progress – data, insight & digital transformation.**

**Theme 3 - Driving collaboration to evolve cultural heritage places and destinations.**

6.4 Theme 1 relates to participating in culture, heritage (and by extension, visitor attractions) having many benefits – by helping to create understanding and build pride in the local community, provide opportunities for social interaction, improve health. and wellbeing, and develops skills. Making heritage ‘everyday’, making culture ‘ordinary’ – will help to deliver against all of these agendas which in turn builds resilient, successful people, places, economies and communities.

6.5 Theme 2.1 relates to developing the sector and its resilience – how to better generate a broader appeal to more audiences and diversify the visitor offer e.g., the outdoor pursuits offer, the dark histories (dark tourism) and screen tourism. Sustainable tourism is another trend alongside food production and ‘field to fork’ experiences. This theme also covers the need to “erode” the gap between “residents” and “visitors” to enable development of communities to build a sense of pride and value of their heritage.

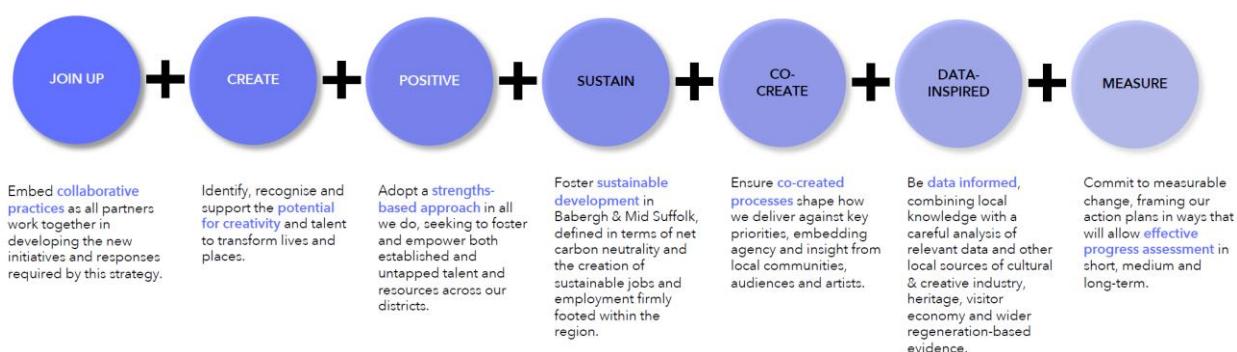
6.6 Theme 2.2 relates to digital transformation - Covid-19 has highlighted and accelerated changes in consumer behaviour that have been building over the past few years. It has driven more consumers online. The research indicates that while many experienced suppliers and businesses are aware of the need for digital transformation, they are being held back by underpowered booking systems and websites, but also by gaps in digital content, knowledge, skills, and budgets. It includes infrastructure, programmes and upskilling - the capture and use of data, and how to harness to drive better intelligence & insight; digital engagement and communications activity; commerciality & income generation.

6.7 Theme 3 relates to creating a strong destination brand and working collaboratively with neighbouring districts and counties. Allowing Mid Suffolk to realise more potential for its assets and communities. For example, working with neighbours, and creating joined up itineraries and visitor offers. It highlights how there are other thematic areas ripe for development which would move towards cultural tourism.

6.8 In taking forward the development and delivery of the Strategy, there will also be three aims, under which a number of draft Objectives have been identified:

- AIM 1: Babergh and Mid Suffolk will support its residents to live full cultural lives, building cultural confidence and civic pride.
- AIM 2: The Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy Sectors will be sustainable, resilient and will champion the region's distinctive qualities.
- AIM 3: Babergh and Mid Suffolk's Culture, Heritage and Visitor sectors will work collaboratively with neighbouring organisations, districts and counties to trial new approaches.

7.8 A set of shared principles have been developed that set out our commitment to working together across places, districts and agendas to deliver on the aspirations contained within this Strategy:



6.9 A dynamic online map of cultural and creative assets has been developed - <https://bit.ly/3WQvB8M>. With over 300 categorised entries, it includes theatres, museums, heritage assets, arts centres, visitor attractions, creative infrastructure and supply chain, cinemas, events and music venues, public art, community hubs, visitor attractions and active lifestyle offer.

## 7. LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN

7.1 The joint Corporate Plan is designed to make sure our places are known for strong growth in innovation and creativity, for being highly connected and sustainable – with the best skilled workforce across the East.

7.2 With a vision for 'Our communities are well connected and valued by residents and visitors' and 'All our communities are attractive, successful and connected places for people to live and work'.

## 8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no financial implications from this report. Any financial implications identified in the Action Plan, and related to council activity, are expected to sit within current council budgets or will be addressed through external bids, other applications for funding or be subject to independent business cases which will be brought back to cabinet as appropriate.

## 9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

## 10. RISK MANAGEMENT

### 10.1 Key risks are set out below:

Key Risk Description	Likelihood 1-4	Impact 1-4	Key Mitigation Measures	Risk Register and Reference*
We may not understand the needs and aspirations of our businesses	3	2	Stakeholder and business consultation undertaken as part of the development of the strategy to ensure that it delivers against the identified needs of our businesses	Significant Risk no 5
Decline in our key towns impacts upon economic prosperity of the districts	2	2	The strategy will provide a focus of support for key sectors within our town centres and will help set the aspiration and vision to ensure long term prosperity	Significant Risk no 8
Failure to achieve our Vision and Strategic priorities and ambition (as articulated in the Corporate Plan)	2	2	The Strategy is deliberately 'High Level' and is informed by a sound evidence base, which will be kept under review. The Strategy and Delivery Plan are informed by internal and external stakeholder engagement to ensure compliance with the Council and partner ambitions.  The Delivery Plan will be monitored continuously and flexed to respond to immediate and changing needs.	Significant Risk no 16
If resources/ expertise are limited or lacking focus or motivation then opportunities may be missed for supporting businesses, growth and productivity or delivering set priorities.	2	2	External consultancy commission to provide specialist support for the development of the strategy.  Networking and collaboration working with partner agencies and businesses/stakeholders.	RISK2A05
If businesses are not supported, particularly during unprecedented Covid challenges, then more businesses may not survive, more jobs may be lost and increased pressure on public funds may result. Reduction of business rates will impact on Council income.	2	2	This strategy will provide a framework for focused support for the Culture, Heritage and visitor Economy sectors who have been hard hit by Covid and cost of living crisis	RISK2A04

\*Name of risk register where risk is currently documented and being actively managed and it's reference number

## **11. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 11.1 The consultation and analysis phase of this work was conducted between October and December 2022. One-to-one consultations were conducted with representatives from a variety of culture, creative, tourism and other sectors.
- 11.2 Some of those consulted also participated in the four in-person workshops, held at The Bank, Eye, Jimmy's Farm & Wildlife Park, Wherstead, Gainsborough's House, Sudbury and The John Peel Centre for Creative Arts, Stowmarket in November 2022. These workshops tested some early and emerging themes developed from the desk research and one-to-one consultations already undertaken, through use of stimulus questions and facilitated discussions. Attendees included community, cultural, heritage, sport and voluntary groups and organisations; businesses; creative practitioners; and Council officers. A list of organisations who participated in these sessions or who attended one of the workshops is included in section D1 of the strategy document.
- 11.3 Stimulus sheets were used to help workshop participants to explore the issues around one of four thematic topics, framed from the responses of earlier 1:1 consultations. These sheets identify early discussion topics and give an indication of the issues and opportunities raised during the consultations.
- 11.4 A cross party member working group was set up with nominees from all parties to ensure that we had broad representation and engagement with Members from across the Districts. This group met three times to discuss the development of the strategy. This group was used to test early outcomes from the stakeholder consultation and the insights report (attached at Appendix B) and helped to shape the work of the consultants.
- 11.5 An internal staff working group including colleagues in Economy, Climate Change, Communities, Planning, Heritage, Public Realm and Communications was convened to ensure that we had a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities in relation to the culture, heritage and visitor economy sector across the organisation and can build this into the delivery plan in due course.
- 11.6 Additionally, extensive desk research has been undertaken to build the picture of existing documents, strategies, data and evidence relating to Babergh & Mid Suffolk Councils-led past and current initiatives and other relevant agencies and organisations. This has built a picture of Babergh & Mid Suffolk's strengths and needs in a local, county and regional context.

## **12. EQUALITY ANALYSIS**

- 12.1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required. There are no equality and diversity implications arising directly from the Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy Strategy at this stage.

## **13. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 There are expected to be positive environmental implications associated with this Strategy. Specifically, that our rich and diverse environment is a significant contributor to people's wellbeing and their enjoyment and reason to visit our Districts and development and promotion of these natural assets will be a key theme in the Strategy.

## **14. APPENDICES**

Title	Location
(a) Culture, Heritage & Visitor Economy Strategy	
(b) Insights Report	

**15. REPORT AUTHORS**

Zoey Banthorpe – Arts and Culture Lead

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