

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL and MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

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| TO: Joint Overview And Scrutiny Committee | REPORT NUMBER: JOS/23/32 |
| FROM: Cllr. Tim Weller – Cabinet Member for Environment, Culture & Wellbeing – Mid Suffolk District Council & Cllr Teresa Davis - Cabinet Member for Thriving Towns and Rural Communities – Mid Suffolk District Council Cllr Derek Davis – Cabinet Member for Economic Growth – Babergh District Council. | DATE OF MEETING: 14/03/2024 |
| OFFICER: Fiona Duhamel, Director – Economic Growth and Climate Change | KEY DECISION REF NO. Item No. |

12-month progress update on the 2023 – 2028 Culture, Heritage, and Visitor Economy Strategy

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide a 12-month review on the work undertaken so far following the adoption of the Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy Strategy in March 2023.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the contents of this report be noted.
- 2.2 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the contents of this report, provide scrutiny and, where appropriate, provide written and/or verbal responses.

REASON FOR DECISION

To provide further insight into the work undertaken since March 2023 to deliver the councils first Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy strategy, with the ambition to shape the future growth of the districts and provide a prospectus for investment.

3. KEY INFORMATION

- 3.1 In March 2023, Creative Tourist were contracted to deliver a Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy Strategy and Action Plan for Babergh and Mid Suffolk, providing a 5-year evidence base as a springboard for our ambitions.
- 3.2 A cross party Member working group was formed and met throughout the Strategy and Action Plan development. The group was used to test early outcomes from stakeholder consultations and the insights reports, acting as critical friends and advocates for the overall vision. The group helped frame the Action Plan and broke it down into more manageable and achievable outputs with smarter objectives.

- 3.3 The Strategy and Action Plan identified three themes:
- THEME 1: BUILDING CULTURAL HABITS – IMPROVING THE EXPERIENCE FOR EVERYDAY RESIDENTS AND VISITORS
 - THEME 2.1: ACCELERATING PROGRESS – DEVELOPING THE SECTOR AND ITS RESILIENCE
 - THEME 2.2: ACCELERATING PROGRESS – DATA, INSIGHT AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
 - THEME 3: DRIVING COLLABORATION TO EVOKE CULTURAL HERITAGE PLACES AND DESTINATION
- 3.2 The adopted Strategy connected the worlds of culture, heritage and tourism – identifying and connecting over 300 places to visit and things to do. The strategy demonstrated how close we are to the huge visitor markets of London and the South-East, and that new developments – like Gainsborough’s House in Sudbury – have successfully launched with more in the pipeline, alongside energetic town partnerships. Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils continue to build strong relationships locally and regionally. However, it’s too easy for tourists to bypass the area on the way to the coast or Broads.
- 3.3 The strategy outlined that lovely landscapes also bring rural isolation, and the strengths of our culture and heritage are not yet joined-up on or offline for our communities or visitors. There are wonderful fine dining offers, great gastropubs, and quality farm shops carrying local produce and food products – if you can find them. We have the UK’s only Food Museum, but we don’t deliver a full ‘field to fork’ offer. We want to make this a stronger part of what we have to offer.
- 3.4 The Strategy and Action Plan prioritises work with businesses, local communities, artists, and environmentalists to grow a sustainable, welcoming, and creative cultural, heritage and visitor offer. Our action plan aims to create benefits in participation and training; growing new visitor markets; and supporting creative entrepreneurs and new talent.
- 3.5 Babergh & Mid Suffolk is diverse – from market town to market town, village to village. The richness of its culture and heritage is a powerful tool in building communities. To build on this, the Action Plan develops consistency of creative opportunity in every community, embedding culture into daily life alongside leisure, sport, wellbeing, social life, and lifelong education. We want to support people to live full cultural lives. We want our tourism to benefit, not damage our part of the world, and most of all we want to do it in partnership.
- 3.6 We are now 12 months into the delivery of this strategy and want to share with you, in Appendix A, a full breakdown of actions to date.
- 3.7 The full Action Plan details 52 individual actions against the main themes. There are 19 specific actions under THEME 1, 16 under THEME 2.1, 7 under THEME 2.2, and 10 under THEME 3.
- 3.14 To date 22 projects or programmes are being delivered through reprioritisation of existing budgets and resources, 17 are being delivered through external funding already received, and we are working on identification of funding for the remaining 13 actions.
- 3.15 This action plan is being delivered throughout the districts and not just where there is more critical mass of culture, heritage and creative businesses. Ensuring that rural organisations and communities are part of the conversation is vital. Additionally, working across boundaries within the county and across county borders is essential in order to help Babergh and Mid Suffolk realise their full potential.

4. LINKS TO CORPORATE PLANS

4.1 Links to Mid Suffolk Plan.

- 4.1.1 The first priority identified within the Mid Suffolk Plan is that Members want to see Mid Suffolk thriving. Not just economically but also culturally, socially and environmentally. With our focus on sustainability and community we want this district to be a great place to live, a great place to work, a great place to do business and a great place to visit.
- 4.1.2 Improved physical and mental well-being: Working in partnership with the voluntary sector to support the health and wellbeing of our residents. Working in partnership with employers and existing employment schemes to support 'life-long skills', progression in and out of employment and work life balance.
- 4.1.3 Respecting, harness and promoting local culture - Protect heritage buildings and bring to life for citizens. Use local history as cultural capital to attract visitors and residents alike. Promote local culture as a tool to increase sense of belonging and pride in district and to enhance local economy. Encourage existing economy to advertise and embed its sustainability to all, a 'field to fork' heritage.
- 4.1.4 Supporting better rural transport improving travel connectivity – projects exploring sustainable travel to cultural and visitor attractions are being developed with audits and assessments being carried out to support the attraction to attract visitors who don't travel by private car.
- 4.1.5 Active citizenship - Champion our communities that are thriving, sharing and showcasing what is working well in our communities.
- 4.1.6 Pride in your place - Work with communities and voluntary groups to ensure residents are proud of where they live and have the means/support to facilitate improving this.
- 4.1.7 Local food production - Develop resilience to shocks in food chain supply through local food production, including developing a comprehensive strategy for local food production, supporting new small-scale growers and producers across the district. Encouraging the setting up of new farmers' markets, farm shops and community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives across the district.
- 4.1.8 Supporting local businesses – the heart of this strategy is to support our culture, heritage and visitor economy businesses to thrive through diversification of offer as well as investment in sustainability and skills development.
- 4.1.9 Supporting the delivery of a greener, skilled economy – working with key partners, we are supporting the creation of new, higher value jobs and careers for life within this key sector.

4.2 Links to the Plan for Babergh

- 4.2.1 We believe that a sustainable society must be built on the strong foundations of its communities, economy and environment.
- 4.2.2 Thriving economy: Prioritising and promoting the green economy, Championing solutions to retrofitting & renewable energy, Promoting higher paid, higher skilled, sustainable jobs for all, Increasing opportunities to learn new skills, particularly those in green technology sectors, Creating the conditions for start-ups & social enterprises to flourish, Supporting local businesses, Attracting inward investment and responsible tourism to our towns and villages, and Ensuring access to the infrastructure your communities need to thrive - the heart of this strategy is to support our culture, heritage and visitor economy businesses to thrive through diversification of offer as well as investment in sustainability and skills development.

- 4.2.3 Promoting greener and healthier forms of travel – projects exploring sustainable travel to cultural and visitor attractions are being developed with audits and assessments being carried out to support the attraction to attract visitors who don't travel by private car.
- 4.2.4 Championing market towns and villages – a substantial number of our key attractions are within our market towns and villages, so through supporting those attractions to flourish, we will help support wider regeneration projects in our towns and villages. Alongside this, there are a range of actions that will deliver direct benefit to our market towns through new events and festivals as well as better public realm and enlivenment projects.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications from this report. Any financial implications identified in activity delivered so far, and throughout the course of the 5-year Action Plan, are expected to sit within current Council budgets or be delivered using external funding via a range of sources including Shared Prosperity Fund, Rural England Development Fund, Lottery Funding, Trusts and Foundations.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no legal implications included in this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 There are no risks associated with this report.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 This report has been shared for consultation with Cabinet Leads for feedback and comment.
- 8.2 Consultations have taken place with Directors, Corporate Managers, and other Budget Managers as appropriate.
- 8.3 The Strategy and Action Plan have been developed in partnership with a range of internal and external colleagues and stakeholders and they are being actively consulted in the development stage of every new action.

9. EQUALITY ANALYSIS

- 9.1 There is no requirement to complete an EQIA at this time.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no direct environmental implications directly associated with this report

11. APPENDICES

| Title | Location |
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| a) Presentation of progress to date | Attached |
| b) Mid Suffolk and Babergh Cultural, Heritage and Visitor Economy Strategy 2023 – 2028 | Attached |

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

13. REPORT AUTHORS

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