

# enqjard

A Strategic Action Plan  
for Tourism 2010-2020



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VisitEngland has worked with the Partners for England Forum and many colleagues from both the public and private sectors to develop the Strategic Framework for Tourism 2010-2020 and this accompanying Action Plan.

The Framework and Action Plan have been created to ensure that England's tourism industry maximises its contribution to the nation's economy, employment and quality of life by addressing the opportunities on offer and challenges facing England's visitor economy. They focus on achieving four interdependent objectives through the delivery of a set of actions by the industry operating in an increasingly coordinated and sustainable manner.

The Strategic Framework will be driven forward and monitored by VisitEngland, but its success will depend on delivery by a range of strategic tourism partners. Ultimately the Board of VisitEngland will be responsible for setting and overseeing the success of the principal target areas and the ambition of an annual 5% growth, with key partners taking responsibility for delivery and reporting progress through an agreed mechanism.

This Action Plan outlines the activity, key milestones, and the organisational partners needed for delivery across the four pillars of work in the Framework. These plans will adapt and evolve over time as other partners come on board and activity starts to take shape and be delivered.

The four pillars will have a champion – an industry representative supported by the VisitEngland team – and each activity will be led by a strategic tourism partner working with the Partners for England Forum.

# Objective 01

To increase  
England's share  
of the global  
visitor market



## 1a Develop an English National Marketing Strategy for domestic and international markets

In order to attract a greater share of higher value domestic and international visitors and maximise capacity year – round, England must have a re-prioritised national marketing strategy with funding aligned to achieve objectives. This will bring together key public sector players and engage the private sector in a collaborative approach to the marketing of England, prioritising collective investment where it can deliver maximum return. Providing higher returns will be one of the key drivers in achieving a 5% annual growth in the visitor economy.

Marketing must build the profile of the England brand in the world marketplace. Informed by a thorough understanding of the visitor's motivations across target markets, marketing will focus on England's most attractive destinations and experiences. An 'attract and disperse' approach will see England's world famous and exceptional destinations such as London, the Lake District and the Cotswolds among many others, used to attract new visitors who can then be encouraged to explore the richness of England. This approach can be embraced at all levels across the country to ensure that the economic benefits are widely felt. Balanced with this, a collaborative cross-destination approach to marketing England's unique attributes can be adopted. This will position and build England's reputation as a destination which delivers the authentic and world-class experiences visitors demand from internationally renowned built and natural heritage, to the vibrant contemporary culture of England's cities; from adventure to indulgence.



Thorpe Park, Surrey

The national marketing strategy will be based on reliable market insights on the value, volume, potential and requirements of each target market and emerging markets, as well as technology trends and an accurate understanding of campaign effectiveness and the need to improve the value proposition of the England offer.

The ever-increasing sophistication of technology allows, and requires, England's tourism industry to be at the forefront of using technology to deliver messages and information that is of value to potential visitors, in shaping their decisions, in linking and packaging destinations and experiences, in communicating them, in cross-selling, in building loyalty and keeping pace with fast changing consumer trends.

Insights show that, particularly in the domestic market, there is a real need to improve the perception of England as a good value destination. In fact England offers complete variety for leisure tourism at any level of budget. Unlike many competitor destinations, it has a world-class selection of free attractions and activities for visitors. Most of England's national museums are free, as are many regional facilities and there is widespread access to coast and countryside. An increase in visitor accommodation provision has included the development of new, purpose-built hotels across the country, many of which offer superb value when pre-booked. There is significant accommodation capacity available in the off peak season and accommodation and travel costs vary greatly due to seasonality and demand. There is a need to make visitors more aware of better value options such as advance ticket purchasing and encouraging off-peak trips.

## 1b Optimise the opportunities of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and the Cultural Olympiad

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games presents the tourism industry in England with a major opportunity

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games presents the tourism industry in England with a major opportunity. Visit London and VisitBritain are leading on ensuring that the legacy marketing benefits are realised for both London and the nations of Britain respectively. Extensive work has also been undertaken by the English Regional Development Agencies. A coherent national plan is required building on existing work to address the opportunities and challenges and determine additional activity to ensure England is fully maximising the potential of the Games and the associated programmes of the Cultural Olympiad and Torch Relay.



Punter, Cambridge

## 1c Develop a Major Events Plan

The England brand embodies many elements that give us a competitive edge internationally and not all of these relate to our traditional strengths of heritage, ceremony and landscape. England is a world leader in music, the arts, architecture and fashion and in many areas of sport. Major events in these fields, such as Glastonbury, London Fashion Week, HM The Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012 and a "Decade of Sport" including the Rugby League World Cup

in 2013, Rugby Union World Cup in 2015 and the Cricket World Cup in 2019, can play a critical role in shaping the image of the nation. It is crucial that England develops a plan, both to capitalise on the opportunities presented by hosting the world class events of the coming decade, but also to attract and develop events in the future which will allow England to highlight and grow its reputation as a vibrant and aspirational brand.

## 1d Develop a Business Tourism Growth Plan

The business visits and events sector is one of the principal contributors to the overall value of English tourism

England leads the world in specialist areas of innovation such as bio-medicines, digital media, genetics and nano-technologies as well as more well-known expertise in the finance, insurance and business service industries. It is therefore well placed to capitalise on the business tourism benefits arising from this association.

The business visits and events sector is one of the principal contributors to the overall value of English tourism. In 2008, total spend in the sector stood at £7.8 bn with £4.2 bn spent by overseas business visitors to England, which is 29.5% of total overseas visitor spend with domestic business spend contributing just over 22% of the total. The wider economic impact of the business visits and events sector to the British economy is estimated to be £22 bn per annum. However, the recession of 2009 had a major impact on this sector and a plan for sustained and overall growth is required. A Business Tourism Action Plan will be created to grow this market.

In addition to the considerable economic benefits brought about by business and events visitors, there are other significant advantages to attracting this market. Business visitors travel throughout the year, contribute a higher spend per visitor, are more likely to travel to areas not traditionally known for holiday visits and are more likely to return as high spend holiday visitors in the future.



LG Arena, Birmingham

Action	Milestones	Lead Responsibility	Partners	Timescale (years in life of Plan)	
01a	Develop an English national marketing strategy for domestic and international markets giving priority to the most attractive destinations and themes	Dec 2010 Annual Review	VisitEngland	Destination Management Organisations; National Marketing Forum; Regional Development Agencies; VisitBritain; Visit London	1-3
01b	Optimise the opportunities of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and the Cultural Olympiad through a coherent national plan	Aug 2010 Annual Review	VisitEngland; Nations and Regions Group	VisitBritain; Visit London; Regional Development Agencies; LOCOG	1-3
01c	Develop a major events plan including HM The Queen's Diamond Jubilee and an English 'Decade of Sport' and identify opportunities to cross-promote destinations and experiences	Oct 2010	VisitEngland	Cultural Agencies; DCMS; Destination Management Organisations; Local Authorities; LOCOG; Regional Development Agencies; VisitBritain; Visit London	1-2
01d	Develop a Business Tourism Action Plan to advise on the best opportunities for growth in business tourism	Mar 2011 Annual Review	Business Tourism Action Group	British Hospitality Association; Business Tourism Group; Conference Bureau; Conference Centres and Arenas; Conference and Incentive Agents; Destination Management Organisations; Exhibition Organisers; Hotel Groups; Meetings Industry Association; Professional Conference Organisers; VisitEngland; Visit London	1-3



# Objective 02

## To create compelling destinations of distinction



## 2a Commit to Regional Tourism Framework Agreements

In most regions, it is possible to combine a number of experiences in a single day from urban chic to outstandingly attractive countryside to dramatic coastline

There are few places in the world that can boast the variety of experiences and landscapes to be found in England. What makes England unique from most competitor destinations is that these are offered in a compact area and the majority are highly accessible by road or by public transport. In most regions, it is possible to combine a number of experiences in a single day from urban chic to outstandingly attractive countryside to dramatic coastline.

With such a varied English tourism offer, there are numerous agencies, from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors with whom the tourism industry can work to ensure that national assets are valued and protected for future generations. These organisations might include the Arts Council, The Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, British Association of Leisure Parks, Piers & Attractions, British Waterways, English Heritage, Historic Houses Association, Museums Association, Museums, Libraries & Archives Council, Natural England, the National Trust, the National Parks, and local food promotion agencies.

The Regional Tourism Framework Agreement (RTFA) provides a framework to better connect work across the visitor economy and cultural sectors, and recognises the different statutory responsibilities of public bodies and regulators. The RTFA is an agreement between VisitEngland and the regions. Each region's representatives involved will sign up to work to achieve the agreed outcomes. These agreements will specifically focus on the development of the visitor economy in a region and alignment of activity with the principles and proposed implementation of the Strategic Framework.



Hadrian's Wall, Northumberland

## 2b Establish a benchmark of best practice in destination management and organisation

The relationship between investment in the visitor economy and the benefits it can bring to the local economy and public places is often overlooked. Local people need to better appreciate the value of tourism in their own community and the fact that it supports their shops, many of their services and their transport infrastructure. Destination management at a local level should take account of both visitors' and residents' needs, the wellbeing of the local visitor economy as well as environmental considerations, to encourage participation and activity at every level. By taking a more holistic approach to destination management the experience and the service standards enjoyed by local people and visitors can be improved. There are numerous ways

The New Forest. In order to make such experiences exceptional, the visitor welcome needs to be applied beyond the confines of the tourism industry. At a strategic level, this needs to be part of the planning process, especially with regard to visitor movement and transport planning.

Some of England's traditional destinations suffer from deteriorating infrastructure. Where there is an opportunity for regeneration – be it in coastal resorts, town centres or around major transport hubs – new developments in the visitor offer should exploit objectives wider than the tourism industry alone; it should also contribute to the social and environmental needs of the area. Examples of where this has been particularly successful include cultural investments in NewcastleGateshead, Bristol and Liverpool Waterfront where new tourism and cultural beacons have acted as a catalyst for further commercial and residential development and wider environmental improvements.

There are many partners that can contribute to improved destination management across England. The principal responsibility for operational maintenance will lie with local authorities, as many statutory requirements such as litter collection and coastal management fall within their remit, but best practice can also be promoted through organisations such as the Improvement and Development Agency, Destination Performance UK and the Tourism Management Institute.

To encourage the highest standards of destination management and planning, a benchmark of best practice and organisation will be developed to help all destinations improve and perform to a standard that will allow local distinctiveness to flourish.

By taking a more holistic approach to destination management the experience and the service standards enjoyed by local people and visitors can be improved



Shakespeare's birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon

this theme can be developed ranging from sourcing locally produced speciality foods to capitalising on unique sporting events or leisure offers. Sometimes these can be offered as a complete experience as pioneered by destinations such as

## 2c Implement the reviewed approach to quality assessment programmes in England

### Quality is much more than star ratings and accreditation

Providing visitors with a first class experience – whether they are travelling for leisure or business – is key to the success of the Strategic Framework. A satisfied visitor is far more likely to return and recommend destinations or experiences to family, friends or colleagues. The challenges for the Strategic Framework are to identify which elements of the visitor experience contribute towards satisfaction, which of these elements can be influenced by whom and how the industry can demonstrate and measure success. Central to the debate on providing the best visitor experience has been ‘quality’, particularly, although not exclusively, with regard to accommodation and the number of establishments star rated by VisitEngland or the AA.

‘Quality’ is much more than star ratings and accreditation. Although these schemes and standards do assess hospitality and service alongside facilities, it is crucial that the whole industry recognises the absolute importance and relevance of the right skills, including customer service and the welcome afforded to all visitors. In the lead up to and during the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, there needs to be a strong welcome element to

quality assessment, which will inform the in-country element of the ‘Welcome To Britain’ campaign, steered by VisitBritain.

The visitor must be at the heart of a new approach to quality and the visitor experience. Recent research has shown that cleanliness and safety are obvious, paramount concerns for the customer and to that end, while continuing to support and champion the current star rating system (NQAS), VisitEngland will also seek to endorse and support local or national programmes which recognise businesses which are compliant with current legislation, meet certain minimum standards, are prepared to observe a basic code of conduct and have a system in place for handling complaints.

At the same time, the tourism industry must ensure that the existing quality standards, especially for accommodation and attractions, reflect changing customer expectations and recognise the role that “user-generated content” and customer feedback can play in complementing rather than replacing official star ratings. VisitEngland will work with partners and with its quality delivery bodies to ensure that standards are relevant, customer-focused and at the same time provide genuine benefits to participating businesses.

## 2d Create an England satisfaction survey

VisitEngland will work with partners to create an England satisfaction survey. This will build on the top-line visitor satisfaction questions within its ongoing brand and communications tracking survey.

The approach to visitor satisfaction measurement will also seek consistency and provide support and guidance in visitor surveys undertaken at local, destination and regional level, thus

enabling benchmarking and comparisons at national level. A set of guidance notes about best practice in visitor surveys has been developed by the ONS Tourism Intelligence Unit (TIU) as part of the English Tourism Intelligence Partnership (ETIP) work programme, and will be rolled out in 2010 following an initial pilot phase.

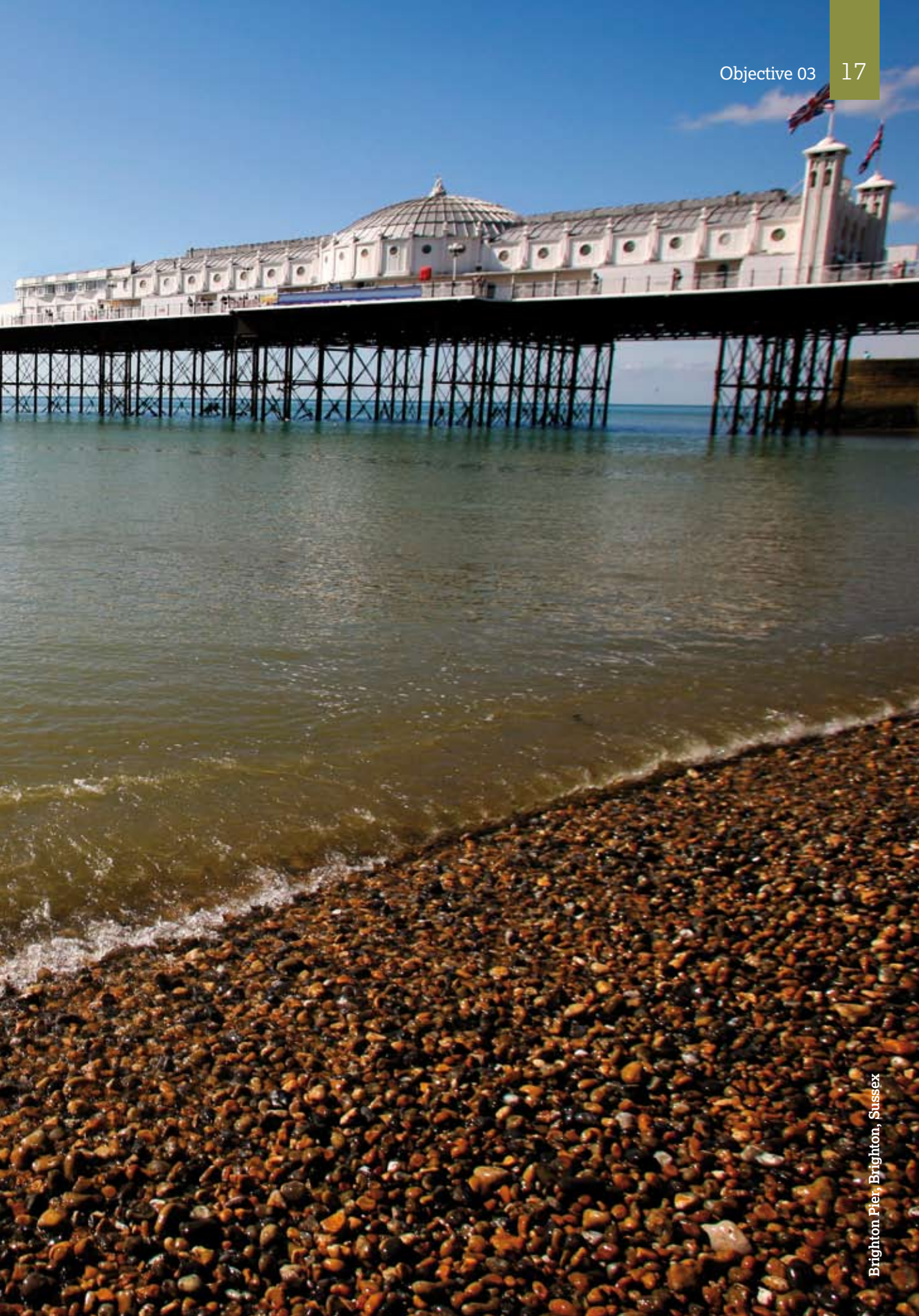


Action	Milestones	Lead Responsibility	Partners	Timescale (years in life of Plan)	
02a	Commit to Regional Tourism Framework Agreements which will provide a consistent approach in support of the visitor economy across England	Mar 2011 Annual Review	VisitEngland	Cultural Agencies; Destination Management Organisations; Local Authorities; Regional Development Agencies	1-2
02b	Establish a benchmark of best practice in destination management and organisation	Apr 2010 Year 1 Pilot Annual Review	VisitEngland; Northwest Development Agency;	British Resorts and Destinations Association; Business Improvement Districts; Destination Management Organisations; Destination Performance UK; Historic Towns Forum; Local Government Association; Tourism Management Institute; Regional Development Agencies	1-3
02c	Implement the reviewed approach to quality assessment programmes in England	Mar 2010 (Stage 1) Mar 2011 (Stage 2) Annual Review	VisitEngland	Quality Assurance Action Group	1-2
02d	Create an England satisfaction survey which provides a national benchmark and greater consistency of data at regional, destination and local levels across England	Apr 2011 Annual Review	VisitEngland	English Tourism Intelligence Partnership; Tourism Intelligence Unit	1-3



# Objective 03

## To champion a successful, thriving industry



### 3a Deliver a National Research and Intelligence Programme

Changing demographics and social groupings have created greater complexity regarding the profile of the visitor market. Traditional conceptions of what might constitute a 'family holiday', for example, might no longer apply. Families might consist of a single parent and child taking a long weekend break or grandparents staying with grandchildren; visiting friends and relatives might entail regular weekend visits between cities throughout the year; there is a growing market for same-sex couples and for private group travel at self-catering establishments that might entail five or six families sharing a farmhouse. The mix has split into many different groupings that were previously unrecognised and continues to diversify. One of the most significant changes over the next ten years will be the increase of people over 65 taking holidays but often displaying visitor behaviour at odds with the traditional expectations of retirees. All of these social changes will have an impact on travel patterns and accommodation demand.

There are various types of statistical and market intelligence needed to ascertain the size and value of the visitor market, its relationship to other sectors and the effectiveness of marketing campaigns. At a national level, England needs reliable volume and value data related to international and domestic overnight visits as well as reliable day visitor statistics. There are particular problems associated with the consistent collecting of tourism data regionally and locally but the formation of the English Tourism Intelligence Partnership (ETIP) and the Office of National Statistics (ONS) Tourism Intelligence Unit (TIU) will ensure that information collected and collated by local authorities and from private sector stakeholders can be utilised to strengthen national statistics down to regional and local data. This can only be effective if organisations at a local level are prepared to share this information and to keep it updated.

**VisitEngland, working with ETIP and the TIU, will develop an annual National Research and Intelligence Programme that responds to the need for information on the value of the visitor economy, the opportunities for growth and the industry's performance. Part of this programme will include encouraging the industry to take up information and use it to better inform management planning. This will build on the good work already progressed and look to sustaining the leadership and vision of ETIP and the TIU beyond 2011.**

Scarborough Bay, North Yorkshire



### 3b Develop a Seaside Resort Action Plan

As purpose-built destinations, many seaside resorts such as Skegness, Scarborough and Torbay, have under-utilised capacity and a readily available tourism infrastructure. However, without regeneration the current level of success, let alone any future expansion, remains vulnerable. Success would be beneficial, not just for tourism but for the entire social, economic and cultural infrastructure.

In order to achieve their full potential, resorts still need to be more widely understood and appreciated – in particular the role of tourism within the fabric of a resort and the role of popular mass and niche resort based tourism in England's society needs to be fully explored. A number of fundamental problems must be resolved; many are not directly related to tourism but impact on the quality of the tourism offer and its ability to improve. How these problems should be addressed needs to be clarified through a Seaside Resort Action Plan.

### 3c Develop a Rural Tourism Action Plan

Rural Tourism although relatively modest in terms of total tourism numbers and spend, is invariably more critical to the local economy and frequently far more important in terms of supporting a viable local economy and labour market than a major city and even resorts. Its needs and support requirements are frequently different from resort, coastal and city/town tourism and a bespoke Action Plan is required if rural tourism is to operate effectively.

It is crucial that the value of tourism, particularly in more remote rural communities, is fully realised by all those

who have a role to play, including local authorities, the National Trust, Natural England and the National Parks. Tourism not only creates employment, but creates a sense of place, provides infrastructure and services, including transport, that benefit both residents and visitors. It can also help to promote a wider understanding of the value and fragility of the natural environment.

The Rural Tourism Action Plan will identify the issues, opportunities and key actions the industry needs to take to deliver the greatest impact for local communities and economies.

### 3d Develop a Sustainable Tourism Action Plan

Tourism brings positive economic benefits to communities and industry along with the potential for negative social and environmental impacts. England can be justifiably proud of its strong history in conservation with examples of world-leading organisations in the National Trust and English Heritage; award-winning and pioneering sustainable destinations in The New Forest and South Devon and green entrepreneurs with the beach management Venus Company amongst many. Sustainability is not a new issue for England's tourism but for it to achieve continued growth, England's visitor economy needs to be further underpinned by sustainable practices and principles. The industry faces the challenge of growing the visitor economy within limitations that are increasingly challenging (for example, a political imperative to reduce carbon outputs) whilst ensuring the experience remains appealing to visitors. There has been some success but fully engaging the sector in sustainable tourism must be addressed. In order to keep pace with a rapidly evolving landscape a Sustainable Tourism Action Plan is required that embraces the industry, states the business case, builds on current practices and future-proofs tourism's development.

**A Sustainable  
Tourism Action  
Plan is required  
that fully engages  
the industry**

### 3e Implement the National Skills Strategy

The success of the tourism industry rests with the quality of its products and services and the National Skills Strategy for hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism, developed by People 1st, aims to ensure that the workforce has the skills to provide a quality service. It is critical that employers can rely on a skilled and versatile workforce to meet its and its customers' needs and the industry requires more skilled chefs, management and customer service staff. Tourism is a flexible and versatile industry to work in and offers a superb range of entry level opportunities for school leavers, for people without formal qualifications, for those re-entering the workforce and for part-time or temporary employees. The industry is well placed to promote itself as a viable career option as well as retain and develop its current workforce.

The National Skills Strategy (NSS) lays out a ten point plan addressing key skill issues and aims to improve business performance and productivity by improving visitor perceptions and experience of customer

service, increasing retention and advancing skills development through better engagement with businesses in the sector. The NSS provides a focus that all tourism agencies and enterprises can work towards.

Progress has been made in customer service. On the back of extensive research looking at World-class customer service two new qualifications have been developed – the level 2 qualification for frontline staff focuses on excellent customer service procedures and behaviours, while the level 3 qualification for managerial and supervisory staff includes modules on coaching and facilitating skills, return on coaching investment and the challenges of managing teams. In addition, customer service will be the focus of training programmes adapted from those successfully used at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games, which will complement and build upon the long established Welcome to Excellence programme.

### 3f Develop a communication and engagement plan to promote industry effectiveness

This Strategic Framework provides the opportunity to work with Government Departments, authorities and agencies to ensure that the benefits of tourism are taken into account in the development of policies and initiatives. The tourism industry remains disconnected from a range of Government departments, some of whose work directly impacts on the operation of the visitor economy. Issues such as unsympathetic trading and fiscal measures, VAT, protracted planning procedures, and visa charges and application processes impact on lucrative emerging markets, making England less competitive than near-European neighbours. England's transport network is sometimes unsympathetic to the needs of leisure and business travellers with visitors competing for seats with commuters or being inconvenienced by weekend engineering works.

Tourism is often treated as something that is tagged on to strategic planning rather than being recognised as a cross-cutting issue that opens up new opportunities for economic development. It has been demonstrated over the last decade that the visitor mix is integral to growing other areas of the economy. The redevelopment of the southern side of the Thames from Westminster Bridge to beyond Tower Bridge has been primarily achieved by tourist attractions acting as a catalyst that has spurred further office, hotel and residential investment. Similar examples can be found at Salford Quays and Bristol Waterfront.

The tourism industry needs to champion the importance of the visitor economy. This process has already started through campaigns such as 'Take Tourism Seriously' led by the Tourism Alliance, but there needs to be a continuing and sustained campaign to convince Government, authorities and agencies at all levels of the value of the industry and its interrelation to other aspects of the economy. Tourism is unique in that by supporting the domestic market, it is attracting direct revenue into the Exchequer.

The visitor economy is interlinked with many other sectors such as transport, skills, culture and sport. In order to meet the Strategic Framework objectives it is vital that communications between all parts of the visitor economy are enhanced to facilitate the dissemination of best practice and case studies of exceptional businesses. Small or Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in particular need business support and guidance in the areas of regulation, legislation, training and development, as well as the ability to network with and learn from their peers.

England's economy needs to promote and support entrepreneurship. While there are significant global companies that dominate sectors of the market (such as four-star and budget accommodation), 80% of the tourism industry is made up of SMEs employing less than 10 staff and in many rural areas, this ratio is much higher. Frequently, such business operations suffer from poor business planning, lack of experience and unrealistic expectations. Many are also seen as a lifestyle option (particularly in more attractive locations) where people who have never worked in catering or hospitality open up their houses as B&Bs. In some respects, informal and accessible nature of the industry is appealing but it can lead to problems both for the businesses themselves and to the wider reputation of England's tourism offer. Help for small businesses can be provided through a range of publicly supported agencies such as Business Link and at a regional level there are various schemes operated by Regional Development Agencies, and in some cases by Destination Management Organisations.

A communication and engagement plan to promote industry effectiveness will deliver a set of consistent messages at all levels within the industry from national agencies to SMEs. It will also identify the support available to SMEs and where they can go for essential information and advice.



Chambermaid, Whatley Manor, Malmesbury

Action	Milestones	Lead Responsibility	Partners	Timescale (years in life of Plan)	
03a	Deliver a National Research and Intelligence programme to better understand the performance of the industry and the market conditions that affect it	Dec 2010 Annual Review	VisitEngland	English Tourism Intelligence Partnership; Local Authorities; Regional Development Agencies; Tourism Intelligence Unit	1-3
03b	Maximise the value of seaside resorts to the visitor economy through a Seaside Resort Action Plan	Dec 2010 Annual Review	British Resorts and Destinations Association	CLG; Coastal Communities Alliance; coastal resorts and destinations; Destination Management Organisations; Local Authorities; Local Government Association; RDA Coastal Towns Network	1-3
03c	Develop a Rural Tourism Action Plan to ensure the importance of tourism to rural communities is better understood and optimised	Dec 2010 Annual Review	Rural Tourism Action Group	Caravan and camping sector; Destination Management Organisations; Farm Stay UK; Historic Houses Association; Local Authorities; Local Government Association; National Trust; VisitEngland	1-3
03d	Establish a Sustainable Tourism Action Plan to build on current best practice; engage the industry and future-proof tourism's development	Dec 2010 Annual Review	Sustainable Tourism Action Group	British Waterways; English National Parks Authorities Association; Local Government Association; Natural England; VisitEngland	1-3
03e	Implement the National Skills Strategy established by People 1st	Mar 2010 Annual Review	People 1st	National Skills Strategy Monitoring and Implementation Group, National Skills Academy for Hospitality; VisitEngland	1-3
03f	Develop a communications and engagement plan to promote greater industry effectiveness	Dec 2010 Annual Review	VisitEngland	British Hospitality Association; DCMS; Destination Management Organisations; Local Authorities; Regional Development Agencies; Partners for England Forum; Tourism Alliance; VisitBritain	1-3



# Objective 04

## To facilitate greater engagement between the visitor and the experience

## 4a Develop a modernised Visitor Information Programme and e-tourism platforms

Research shows that destinations benefit from hosting informed visitors who stay longer and spend more. Visitor information provision has been revolutionised over the past 15 years and the technological advances, which have enabled web applications and social networking, are rapidly evolving. Information is often distributed independently of any official tourism organisations and it is in the interest of visitors and residents alike to have access to the correct level of information when they need it.

The way visitors choose, plan and book their holiday has also changed beyond recognition over the past decade. Technological advances mean a rapidly evolving market and more flexibility in customer choice and behaviour. This has made anticipating customer decision-making increasingly complex. By mixing and matching from a wider range of options, visitors are no longer conforming to traditional marketing profiles. This has been exacerbated by the revolution in the budget travel sector, which has enabled new destinations to emerge while increasing overall demand.

The role of traditional Tourist Information Centres (TIC) in the digital world is increasingly questioned. There are places where the TIC acting as a visitor welcome centre or regional gateway is an essential element of the tourism infrastructure. There are areas of the country where digital media is not a solution because of poor reception. What is required is a level of consistency so visitors are aware of where they can access appropriate information. Socially generated content provides for a fast and innovative way of communicating with potential visitors. The industry must capitalise on the rapid growth of networks such as Twitter and Facebook and use these as part of their marketing tools.

There is a need for a modernisation programme that utilises the major advances in technology and responds to new and emerging innovative solutions. It is time to take a fresh look at the way information is collected and distributed to visitors and the related services that can be offered, while reassessing the respective roles of the public and private sectors in this changing environment. This will define the England Visitor Information Services Network of the future that will be at the forefront of provision when measured against England's global competitors.

Technological advances mean a rapidly evolving market and more flexibility in customer choice and behaviour



## 4b Develop a Tourism Transport Action Plan



Big Ben, London

One of the greatest opportunities to provide an improved visitor experience is to achieve greater coordination between the visitor and transport providers. Transport in England is a huge sector with many competing stakeholders but England's transport provision does not always compare well with some competitor destinations. Nor do transport planners and policy makers recognise that tourism accounts for 70% of long distance travel in Britain. While there have been improvements in the coordination of public transport, this is set against a background of declining frequency of services – especially in rural areas and in particular with most bus services outside London – and some severe overcrowding on railways. England has suffered from a long-term lack of investment in public transport infrastructure and, although progress is being made, the visitor experience of public transport can be negative. The priority of transport planners is generally to deal with static populations in the areas they serve – residents, local workers, commuters – and visitors are often seen as a secondary consideration and yet nearly one third of all train travel within England is made for tourism and long distance leisure journeys

Important though rail travel is, especially for city destinations, 80% of all domestic tourism travel is by car. For many, the convenience of the car in reaching rural

and coastal destinations, with family luggage or sports equipment, and being able to travel easily around the destination area, is a key benefit of a domestic holiday. Sensible management of the car in the destination area must be coupled with ease of access to those areas, whose economies are so dependent on visitors and the holiday choices they make.

The travel needs of England's tourists must be recognised. The dependence of the visitor economy in England on tourists being able to get to their destinations easily cannot be overestimated. Through the Strategic Framework, VisitEngland is ready to enter into a full and well-evidenced dialogue with transport policy makers at regional and national levels, to ensure that the huge importance of leisure travel on England's transport networks is fully appreciated and taken on board in decision-making.

A Tourism Transport Action Plan will be developed, working with the industry, to ensure a sustainable approach to leisure travel practices and to ensure that the visitor is considered in the initial travel planning process. There is also scope to further develop the theme of off-peak travel, encouraging visitors to take advantage of less congested roads, together with the larger discounts available on the public transport networks.

Ensure public and commercial partners work together to create a cohesive travel experience within England

## 4c Review of tourism infrastructure including signposting and key access 'gateway' points

As travel has increased, and with an aging transport infrastructure, England's industries should ask whether the country's airports, major railway stations and ports can compete internationally. While security considerations can inconvenience visitors and cause delays, most passengers accept these as a necessary consequence of international travel. However, the tourism industry adds to this burden by failing to provide any

sense of welcome, physical or otherwise. England's key points of arrival are large and often difficult to navigate and there is insufficient 'gateway' information once visitors have passed through Customs. A review of tourism infrastructure and key stages of the visitor experience is needed to ensure public and commercial partners work together to create a cohesive travel experience within England.

## 4d Implement the Welcome to England Programme

The Welcome to England Programme will significantly enhance the visitor welcome. The national Welcome to Britain steering group, with public and private partners from the tourism industry, has introduced teams to deliver activity 'Out of Country', at 'Ports of Entry' and 'Within Country'.

**Welcome to England activities will be delivered by key partners across the industry, led by VisitEngland and England's Regional Development Agencies.**

Activities work across the four pillars of the Strategic Framework and include introducing effective measurement of customer service standards, comparable at destination, national and international levels; Welcome Audits and improvement plans at airports across England; creation of local Welcome Greeter Networks, with residents volunteering to greet visitors at the destination and development of a pre-Games training camp toolkit for venues and destinations to ensure an appropriate level of Welcome to Olympic teams, their visitors and media.

## 4e Develop and implement a programme to improve accessibility for disabled visitors



12% of all overnight domestic trips in England between January and June 2009 were made by groups of visitors including at least one person with special access needs. These visits contributed almost £1bn to the visitor economy. Taking this figure in conjunction with the knowledge that there are over 11 million people in England with some kind of disability, demonstrates the huge opportunity that this market presents for the tourism industry. England enjoys a reasonably good reputation for its provision for disabled visitors but with the country firmly in the spotlight during the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, this provision needs to be improved further and the concurrent opportunities seized.

There are three key priorities. The first is to ensure that disabled visitors (and their families, friends and carers) can source comprehensive and accurate information about access provision. The national product database, access statements and user reviews and forums should all play a

part in this provision. The second priority is to raise awareness of the needs of the disabled market to the wider tourism industry, where a combination of simple adjustments to facilities, together with the provision of excellent customer service, can make a real difference to the experience of the disabled visitor – and potentially to the bottom line of the business. The third priority is to, where possible, encourage greater investment in facilities and infrastructure, which could include extending the reach of the existing National Accessible Scheme (NAS).

Perhaps the real key to success is to continue efforts to 'mainstream' accessibility so that it is not seen as an 'add-on' but that the provision of information, services and facilities for the disabled visitor (and not solely the wheelchair user) is an integral part of good business practice.

Action	Milestones	Lead Responsibility	Partners	Timescale (years in life of Plan)	
04a	Develop and implement a programme to modernise visitor information and e-tourism platforms	Mar 2011 Annual Review	VisitEngland	Blue Badge Guides; Content providers; Destination Management Organisations; Local Authorities; Regional Development Agencies	1-3
04b	Identify key priorities for the tourism industry in England's transport infrastructure and develop a Tourism Transport Action Plan	Mar 2011 Annual Review	VisitEngland	Association of Train Operating Companies; Coach Tourism Council; Confederation of Passenger Transport; DCMS; Department for Transport; Local Authorities Transport for London	1-3
04c	Review of tourism infrastructure including signposting and access at key 'gateway' points	Mar 2011 Annual Review	VisitEngland	Destination Management Organisations; Transport Operating Companies	1-3
04d	Implement the Welcome to England Programme to ensure visitors' reception at key points on their journey is of a consistently high standard	Aug 2010 Annual Review	VisitEngland	Blue Badge Guides; People 1st; South West Regional Development Agency; VisitBritain	1-3
04e	Develop and implement a programme to improve accessibility for disabled visitors	Jun 2010 Annual Review	VisitEngland	DCMS Accessibility Stakeholders Forum; Destination Management Organisations; Regional Development Agencies; Local Authorities; Local Government Association; Tourism for All; Transport for London	1-3

# This Action Plan is a three-year work programme within the ten-year Strategic Framework for Tourism in England

This Action plan will be constantly reviewed and will need to evolve over the next ten years to address new challenges, new opportunities and changing priorities.

The Partners for England Forum will support the delivery of this Action Plan and will provide an effective mechanism for engagement and communication at the national, regional, destination and local level. It will be the vehicle that allows English tourism stakeholders to be directly involved in the development of English tourism.

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