



Northern Devon Tourism Strategy 2018 – 2022

Supporting growth in northern Devon

North Devon Council & Torrington District Council
in partnership with North Devon Marketing Bureau



Linda Thompson by courtesy of North Devon Marketing Bureau





INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of northern Devon's most important sectors, estimated to be worth some £0.56 billion and to support more than 11,100 local jobs ('northern Devon' comprises the combined North Devon and Torrington District areas). The sector is particularly important to many of our most rural and peripheral communities, where it is often difficult to find businesses and employment that are not in some way reliant on tourism.

We are fortunate to live and work in one of the world's most beautiful places and privileged to be able to share that with others to generate business opportunities and employment for our communities. Each year we welcome over 6 million visitors to northern Devon. Their experiences of the area are not just defined by our natural and built features, but also by their use of public services, infrastructure and their contact with a range of often very small businesses who collectively provide their accommodation, food and drink, attraction and entertainment options. If we are to maximise the opportunities that tourism presents in a manner that does not damage the area's main assets and capacity to support livelihoods in the future, we must work together. And if visitors are to have excellent experiences of northern Devon, we all need to be at the top of our game.

This joint strategy sets out how North Devon Council and Torrington District Council together will support the development of tourism in northern Devon over the next five years with the aim of growing the value of the visitor economy. The strategy has been prepared in partnership with North Devon Marketing Bureau through a bottom-up process based upon consultation with businesses and key stakeholders, setting out an agenda for collective action. As District Councils, we will take a lead role in many of the required activities. In other areas, where other stakeholders may have a primary interest, we can help to facilitate and support. A key theme throughout is partnership working to achieve the strategy's aims together.

As with any strategy, things will change and new opportunities will arise. At the heart of this document is a flexible framework which has driven the range of agenda items and can be added to and adjusted over time. We expect to refresh this framework in response to circumstances, adding new strategic actions as appropriate.

TOURISM IN NORTHERN DEVON

Northern Devon's peripheral location, distanced from the main urban centres to the south and east with only limited transport connections across the natural barriers of Exmoor and Dartmoor, is one of the area's strengths and weaknesses.

The area's 'get away from it all' isolation and unspoilt rural character and charm are increasingly rare commodities within a busy world, where making time to relax and recharge is often considered a luxury. But at the same time, a key challenge is reaching and connecting with visitor markets many miles away to raise awareness of and interest in northern Devon and to convert that awareness into action.

For those who have discovered northern Devon, and many have, the rewards are many:

- A world class natural environment, with internationally important landscapes and coastlines, award winning beaches, untouched rural gems, and diverse wildlife and plant life.
- A National Park, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, two Heritage Coasts, three Marine Conservation Zones, including England's first around dramatic Lundy Island, and the unique medieval landscape of Braunton Great Field.
- Distinctive market towns, coastal and rural communities and a rich heritage, including unique historic buildings, harbours and gardens, a history of maritime exploration and piracy, World War II military sites, links to the USA and an historically important ceramics industry.
- Extensive opportunities for outdoor activities and exploration, including walking, off-road and long-distance cycle trails, excellent conditions for surfing, sailing and other watersports, wildlife-watching, fishing, golf.
- A vibrant contemporary arts and cultural scene with important museums and galleries.
- Colourful festivals and events reflecting the heritage, character and spirit of the area.
- An extensive range of quality accommodation and attractions.
- Locally produced and nationally acclaimed food and drink, with opportunities to visit and taste.
- Award winning attractions, from theme parks to gardens, offering an exciting range of things to do.



THE VALUE OF TOURISM TO NORTHERN DEVON

Each year significant numbers of visitors are attracted to northern Devon. Through their direct spending and additional indirect and induced spending generated by tourism-related businesses and their employees, the visitor economy in northern Devon generates important economic and social benefits for the area.

In 2016...

northern Devon attracted an estimated:

**6.3m
visitors**

1.3m staying trips
5.0m day trips

who spent:

£480m

£311m by staying visitors
£169m by day visitors

Overnight visitors stayed a total of:

**5.6m
nights**

9% were overseas visitor nights
compared to 15% across Devon

The visitor economy supported more than:

**11,100
jobs**

19% of employment in North Devon
10% of employment in Torridge

...and business turnover in excess of:

**£0.56
billion**

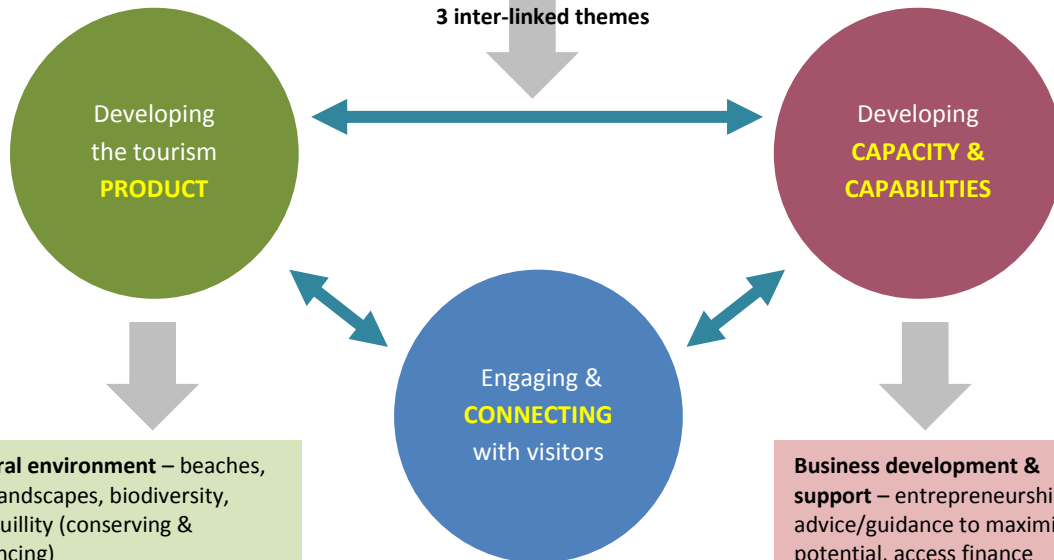
including as a result of tourism business spending locally and employee spending

OUR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

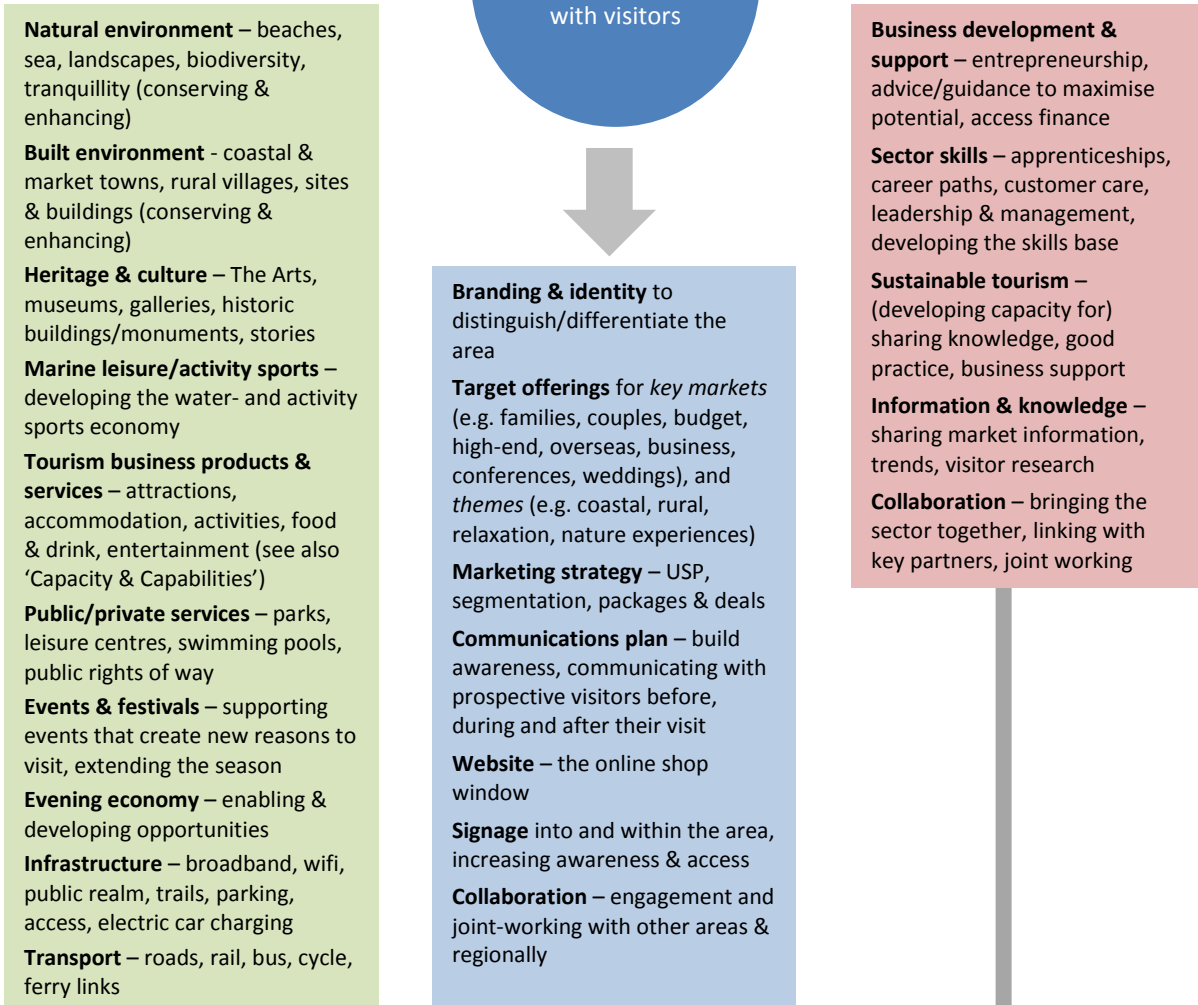
mission

Mission: We will work collaboratively to grow the value of the northern Devon visitor economy by ensuring our tourism offer excites and delights. We will do this by drawing on our unique environment and cultural assets, and by providing world-class hospitality, year-round. We will promote northern Devon as the destination of choice for higher value domestic and overseas visitors.

themes



scope



delivery

- Elements led by relevant **lead organisations** e.g. local authorities, NDMB, public agencies/authorities, individual businesses
- Develop appropriate **action plans**
- Close **joint working** across the range of activities and sectors

The framework

Our Strategic Framework is the product of discussions and consultation with tourism-related businesses and stakeholder organisations around the issues and opportunities facing the development of tourism in northern Devon. Themes and priorities emerged from the results of a strategy workshop, organised in conjunction with the North Devon Marketing Bureau in November 2017, and were refined through further consultation with the sector. The resultant Framework presents a structure and an agenda for collective action. It recognises that tourism is a complex industry with multiple dependencies and stakeholders, and that in order to make significant progress we need to work closely together in a joined-up manner.

Our mission

Our mission and ‘direction of travel’ is:

“We will work collaboratively to grow the value of the northern Devon visitor economy by ensuring our tourism offer excites and delights. We will do this by drawing on our unique environment and cultural assets, and by providing world-class hospitality, year-round. We will promote northern Devon as the destination of choice for higher value domestic and overseas visitors”.

Key themes

To support this mission, we have organised activity within three inter-linked themes which emerged from the discussions and consultation:

1. *Developing the tourism product* – the core assets, facilities and infrastructure upon which tourism depends to attract and retain visitors in the area.
2. *Engaging and connecting with visitors* – reaching out to potential visitor markets to raise awareness and impetus to visit, and to inform their experiences.
3. *Developing capacity and capabilities* of individual businesses and of the sector as a whole in northern Devon to take advantage of opportunities and potential for growth.

These themes are inter-linked so that action taken under one theme can influence and support activities within others. In this way the Framework encourages and benefits from joined-up thinking and working, with flexibility to respond to changing circumstances.

Core principles

Core principles and ‘cross-cutting themes’ that will be relevant to all planned activities are:

- *Partnership working* – working positively together to deliver joined-up solutions.
- *Growth & productivity* – a focus on benefiting the area economically through new business opportunities and productivity gains.
- *Sustainability* – preferring ‘wise growth’ that does not compromise the high quality environmental and cultural assets upon which the future of tourism in the area depends.
- *Generating benefits for host communities* – delivering social and economic benefits for the communities that host tourism activity and for the wider northern Devon area.

DELIVERY & ACTIVITY PLANS

As District Councils, we anticipate playing a key role within each of the three themes. The sections below outline where and how we expect to add value. In some areas, such as public services and infrastructure, we are well-placed to take a lead, working with appropriate partners to deliver actions. In other areas, such as branding and marketing where the North Devon Marketing Bureau will lead, we expect to play more of a supportive role, for example in helping to convene appropriate working groups and facilitating joined-up discussions and activity. For each of the following activities we expect to raise appropriate action plans in conjunction with key partners.

1. Developing the Tourism Product

Within this theme we will lead and support initiatives that bring communities and partners together to enhance the core tourism product which is collectively owned.

In developing the key tourism assets, infrastructure and facilities upon which tourism in northern Devon depends, we will:



Neville Stanikk by courtesy of North Devon Coast AONB

a. The natural environment – beaches, sea, landscapes, biodiversity, tranquillity (conserving and enhancing)

- *Landscape and conservation* - Support northern Devon's landscape and conservation designations, including Exmoor National Park, North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, which are central to the area's attraction for visitors.
- *Nature tourism* - Work with key partners to develop the 'natural environment product' and appropriate opportunities for exploring, walking, cycling, watersports, wildlife watching, experiencing 'Dark Skies' and other nature-based tourism. We will develop a joint action plan with partners.
- *Enhancing quality* - Support the area's Blue Flag status beaches and initiatives to enhance the environmental quality of the area.
- *Access* - Promote the use of northern Devon's natural areas and support the enhancement of appropriate access and facilities, including beach and disability access.

b. The built environment – coastal & market towns, rural villages, sites & buildings (protecting and enhancing)

- *Conserve and enhance* - Through Planning Policy, conserve and enhance the diversity and quality of the built environment as a significant attraction for visitors, including historic market towns and harbours.
- *Coastal settlements* - Support the area's Coastal Community Teams to deliver strategies for development of their local economy, in particular the visitor economy.

- *Market towns* - Encourage and support other market towns to develop local strategies to enhance the visitor proposition and to make the very most of the area's assets. We will create frameworks for developing strategies and local marketing plans.
- c. Heritage & culture – the Arts, museums, historic buildings/monuments, gardens, stories**
 - *A joined-up visitor proposition* - Work with key partners to develop a strategy and action plan for a joined-up heritage and culture visitor proposition to attract new visitors to the area, year-round.
 - *Support new attractions* - Support and help develop arts, culture and heritage attractions that tap into and help promote the area's heritage and culture.
- d. Marine leisure/activity sports – developing the water- and activity sports economy**
 - *A joined-up visitor proposition* - Work with key partners and operators to develop a strategy and action plan for a joined-up Marine Leisure proposition and for other activity sports to attract new visitors to the area, year-round.
 - *Ilfracombe Watersports Centre* – Develop and manage Ilfracombe Watersports Centre as a focal point for marine leisure activities in the northern part of the area.
- e. Tourism business products & services – attractions, accommodation, food & drink, entertainment**
 - *Support investment* – Encourage investment in accommodation, attractions, food & drink, retail and other tourism-related businesses in northern Devon to increase quality, in particular enhanced wet-weather options.
 - *Product development* – Through partnerships, encourage the collective development of new and enhanced tourism products (e.g. area-wide food & drink, business tourism, garden tourism, for TV/film companies, weddings). We will help develop action plans with partners.
 - *Town centres* - Support Town Centre Managers, Chambers of Commerce and other business groups to increase the vibrancy and footfall of the area's market towns through joint working.
 - *Accessibility* – Work across the sector and with key agencies to ensure that visitors with disabilities, experiencing physical and/or mental health issues, have increasing access to the range of facilities in the area, including through the provision of information and customer service.
- f. Public/private services – direct delivery of services for visitors (e.g. parks, leisure centres, swimming pools, public rights of way)**
 - *Public facilities* – Develop and promote the range of District Council owned and supported sports, leisure and entertainment facilities to visitors and residents.
- g. Events & festivals – supporting events that create new reasons to visit, extend the season**
 - *A calendar of events* – Work with organisers to establish a joined-up calendar of events to present a varied programme for visitors and residents.
 - *New events & festivals* - Encourage innovative new events and festivals to inspire new visits to the area, particularly out of season.

- *Building resilience* - Help to strengthen the programme of existing festivals and events, supporting organisers to develop resilience and long-term sustainability.
- *North Devon FoodFest* – support the development of the North Devon Foodfest as a showcase for the area’s food & drink proposition.
- *Disseminate information* - Help to build better awareness of the programme of festivals and events in northern Devon to increase visitor numbers and overnight stays, particularly outside of the main season.

h. Evening economy – developing opportunities

- *Developing action plans* – Work with Town Centre Managers, Chambers of Commerce and other business groups to develop appropriate action plans for development of the evening economy.

i. Infrastructure – broadband, wifi, public realm, trails, parking, access

- *Public realm* - Work with the sector to inform the development and enhancement of appropriate public realm that adds positive value to the visitor experience.
- *New developments* - Ensure that the value of tourism is recognised within appropriate regeneration plans and Development Briefs for key sites within the area.
- *Broadband & mobile network* – Work with tourism-related businesses to raise awareness regionally and nationally of Broadband and mobile network issues within northern Devon and support initiatives to increase reach and performance across the area.
- *Parking* - Maintain the public parking network across the area and work with landowners and operators to ensure adequate provision to support the visitor economy.
- *WiFi & electric vehicle charging points* - Work with communities to increase the provision of WiFi and electric vehicle charging points within towns and villages.
- *Green infrastructure* - Work with partners to maintain and enhance the Tarka Trail and to assist communities to draw value from proximity to the Trail, the South West Coast Path, the Devon Coast to Coast Cycle Route and the Tarka Rail Line.

j. Transport – roads, rail, bus, cycle

- *Access to the area* - Work with transport operators (rail, bus, coach, ferry, air) to identify opportunities to enhance the ‘visitor journey’ into the area, including accessibility.
- *Public transport connections within the area* - Encourage joined-up public transport solutions within the area to increase car-free visit options.
- *Road quality* – Work with partners to identify and raise awareness of road problems within and into the area and to support actions to improve.
- *Sustainable transport* - Explore with partners the scope and viability for sustainable transport solutions that add value for visitors and generate environmental and community benefits.

2. Engaging and Connecting with Visitors

Within this theme we will play a supporting and facilitating role to the sector to help develop a range of activities focused on engaging and connecting with visitor markets to build awareness and interest, leading to new and extended visits.

We will:



Neville Stanikk by courtesy of North Devon Coast AONB

a. Branding & Identity – to distinguish and differentiate the area

- *Identity* – Work with the sector to review branding and identity to ensure that it supports current and future aspirations for the area.

b. Marketing strategy – segmentation, offerings, packages, promotions & deals

- *A strategy for marketing the area* – Support the sector to develop a strategy and action plan for marketing the area to key audiences, including:
 - *Market analysis* – Understanding the nature of tourism in the area and wider trends.
 - Consideration of *strengths, weaknesses and unique selling points*.
 - *Offerings for key markets* – Identifying key visitor market segments (e.g. families, couples, budget, high-end, international, business, coach parties) and the range of appropriate clustered products and experiences to offer them.
 - *Offerings for key themes* – Identifying key interest ‘themes’ (e.g. coastal, rural, nature, health & relaxation), and the relevant clustered package of tourism products and experiences to offer visitors.

c. Communications plan – build awareness, communicating with prospective visitors before, during and after their visit

- *Communicating with customers* - Support the sector to develop an appropriate Communications Plan to engage with and sell the area to existing and new target visitor groups before, during and after visits.

d. Website – the online shop window

- *Website content* – Support the sector to populate and maintain the northdevon.com website as the online shop window for the destination area in line with the Marketing Strategy.
- *Promotion* – Help promote the northdevon.com website wherever appropriate.

e. Signage – increasing awareness & access

- *Strategy and action plan* – Support the sector and engage with key partners to develop an appropriate strategy for signage into and within the area (e.g. to ensure appropriate access to key attractions, facilities, car parks).

f. Collaboration – engagement and joint-working with other areas & regionally

- *Co-operation & joint initiatives* – Work closely with the sector to explore opportunities for working with other destination areas and regionally on strategic product development and marketing.

3. Developing Capacity and Capabilities

Within this theme we will deliver and support activities and initiatives that assist the growth of tourism businesses and build knowledge, capacity and resilience within the sector as a whole.

We will:



Neville Stanikk by courtesy of North Devon Coast AONB

- a. **Business development & support** – *entrepreneurship, advice/guidance to maximise potential, access to finance*
 - *Business support* – Work with partners to increase access to business advice and support programmes that develop entrepreneurship and growth potential.
 - *Access to finance* – Disseminate information about new grant and finance schemes for which tourism businesses would be eligible to apply.
 - *Disseminating innovations* - Support the dissemination of new market innovations, including sustainable business practices, which add value to the visitor proposition and increase productivity within the sector.
- b. **Sector skills** – *apprenticeships, career paths, customer care, leadership & management, developing the skills base*
 - *Tourism skills action plan* - Work with key partners to develop an action plan to identify and address the future skills needs of the sector, including apprenticeships, career paths, customer care, leadership and management.
- c. **Sustainable tourism** – *(developing capacity for) sharing knowledge, good practice, business support*
 - *Sustainable business practices* - Support initiatives that increase the adoption of innovative sustainable business practices within tourism-related businesses (see also ‘business development & support’).
 - *Key projects* - Work in partnership with Exmoor National Park, North Devon Coast AONB, and North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve to support projects that manage the environmental impact that tourism brings in a positive manner and develop a ‘sustainable tourism’ product for northern Devon.
 - *Collective initiatives* - Support other collective initiatives that aim to develop and support a ‘sustainable tourism’ offer in northern Devon and to mitigate the impact of tourism upon the environment e.g. visitor payback schemes, Plastic Free North Devon initiatives.
 - *Communication* – Support the promotion of northern Devon’s ‘green tourism’ offer (see also ‘engaging and connecting with visitors’).

d. Information & knowledge – sharing market information, trends, visitor research

- *National trends* – Disseminate relevant market information, key trends and ‘value of tourism’ data for the North Devon and Torridge areas to inform business decision-making and develop wider understanding of the nature and value of the visitor economy.
- *Consumer research* - Deliver/commission local research as appropriate to understand the nature and behaviour of visitors to the area, and their experiences of northern Devon to inform marketing and communications activity.

e. Collaboration – bringing the sector together, linking with key partners, joint working

- *Joint working* – Work closely with the sector and relevant partners on all aspects of the strategy, including forming joint working groups as appropriate, and reporting on progress at meetings and sector events.
- *Meetings and events* – Arranging and supporting meetings and events which bring the sector together and advance the Tourism Strategy.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Our strategy is focused on working collaboratively to grow the value of the visitor economy in northern Devon. Ultimately we will look to indicators such numbers of visitors, amount of tourism-related expenditure and employment as measures of long-term progress.

But in the shorter-term, we are more focused on change and helping to make things happen in a joined-up way. We will therefore also measure progress in terms of the number of partners engaged in strategic tourism activity, the number of new projects and initiatives that have commenced, and things that have improved and changed for visitors, businesses, communities, and for the core tourism assets upon which the visitor economy depends.

Where we have lead responsibility for an activity, we will identify a range of relevant indicators to measure specific impact and success, and will encourage other lead partners to do likewise. We will report progress on an annual basis.

