



City of

Stoke-on-Trent

# STOKE-ON-TRENT VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY 2022-2027









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# 1. FOREWORD

This Visitor Economy Strategy represents our vision to transform Stoke-on-Trent into one of the region's most important cultural tourism destinations within the next five years, to maximise the economic potential of our heritage, cultural and leisure assets and to place cultural activity at the heart of our placemaking ambitions.

By building on our city's established reputation as the World Capital of Ceramics, we aim to create a unique and enticing visitor destination – a vibrant 'City of Imagination' which combines our renowned cultural offer with distinctive new attractions and makes the most of our scenic green spaces, landscapes and waterways.

Earlier this year, Stoke-on-Trent City Council worked with the city's most influential partners from the cultural sector to develop a refreshed Cultural Strategy for the next six years. The revised strategy aims to unlock the incredible potential of culture, heritage and creativity within Stoke-on-Trent in order to maximise the benefits of the Levelling Up agenda and transform a wide range of outcomes for our residents and communities.

The Visitor Economy Strategy outlines how we will capitalise on Stoke-on-Trent's enhanced cultural status to create a vibrant and compelling cultural tourism offer that delivers more jobs and skills and makes a significant contribution to the city's economic resurgence.

The potential rewards are sizeable, and we are starting from a strong base, having made enormous strides towards establishing Stoke-on-Trent as a highly popular visitor destination prior to 2020. The key challenge, and the biggest economic rewards, now lie in the development and successful promotion of a sufficiently coherent and attractive tourism offer that can translate more visits into overnight stays and increased spending. Until we are able to convert repeat day trips into weekend breaks and holidays, we will only scratch the surface of the enormous economic potential of our cultural and heritage offer.

We will continue to work closely with the city's tourism sector and other stakeholders to create attractive packages and experiences, while transforming our evening offer with high-quality venues and events that will appeal to our target markets. We will provide the strategic vision and political leadership to ensure that the tourism, culture, heritage and leisure sectors can collaborate more effectively to exploit new markets and invest in creating quality experiences.

The challenge now is to build on our considerable achievements in creative and sustainable ways to ensure that our city not only appeals but inspires. Accomplishing our ambitions in challenging economic times will require even greater investment, creativity, passion and innovation – qualities which our City of Imagination has in abundance.

**Councillor Lorraine Beardmore**

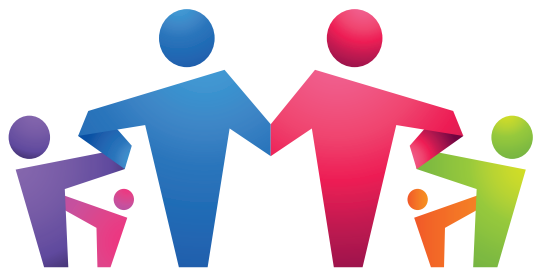
Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Public Health





# 2

## STRONGER TOGETHER STRATEGIC PLAN



# STRONGER TOGETHER

*Working together to create a stronger city we can all be proud of*

The strategic plan delivers a clear vision for the next five years. For our city and its residents to achieve their full potential, we need to focus on the outcomes that we want to change and how we are going to achieve this crucial transformation. This includes continuing to look for better ways to deliver our services, and considering whether some of the things we do might be better done by others. As a City Council, we will continue to work with local, regional and national partners to get the very best for our city, and to make it a city we can all be proud of.

To achieve the vision and priorities and overcome the challenges facing the city, the City Council is committed to building on the progress that has been achieved over the last four years in terms of financial stability, innovation and commercialisation. In that time, Stronger Together has helped to transform Stoke-on-Trent into one of the fastest-growing local economies which is outstripping most other areas in terms of job creation.

### **Stronger Together values**

Partnership working is at the heart of our Stronger Together vision and success will be dependent upon everyone playing their part and doing what they can to help make the vision a reality. We are determined to build on the momentum of change achieved so far, but we know that we cannot deliver our vision and priorities on our own. It is more important than ever that we build and strengthen relationships with all of the stakeholders who are connected with Stoke-on-Trent in order to focus efforts on the challenges and opportunities that we need to address and to improve the outcomes that shape our communities and people's ability to fulfil their potential.

The five Stronger Together values are:

- Ownership and accountability: Being open and transparent; empowering communities.
- Ambition: Striving to deliver the best possible outcomes for our residents.
- Respect: Valuing and respecting the contributions of others.
- Involvement: Working with residents and communities; involving people in decisions.
- Working with others: Work with people and organisations who have a contribution to make and want to help us deliver the best outcomes for Stoke-on-Trent.



## Stronger Together priorities and objectives relating to the visitor economy

Stronger Together comprises five priorities, each underpinned by five strategic objectives that the City Council aims to achieve or deliver significant progress against by 2024.



Support vulnerable people in our communities to live their lives well



Enable our residents to fulfil their potential



Help businesses to thrive and make our city more prosperous



Work with our communities to make them healthier, safer and more sustainable



An innovative and commercial council, providing effective leadership to help transform outcomes



The key priorities and strategic objectives relating to the Visitor Economy Strategy are:

<b>Stronger Together priority</b>	<b>Strategic objective</b>	<b>Relevance to Visitor Economy Strategy</b>
<p>Help businesses to thrive and make our city more prosperous</p>	<p>Celebrate our great city as a destination for business, heritage and culture</p>	<p>The actions within this strategy will celebrate and promote our great city and increase the number of visitors. These priority actions will help to improve the perception of the City to visitors, will encourage our private sector to work more effectively together to enhance the visitor experience and to showcase the diverse range of attractions on offer within Stoke-on-Trent.</p>
<p>An innovative and commercial council, providing effective leadership to help transform outcomes</p>	<p>Work with partners to devise innovative and collaborative approaches to local challenges</p>	<p>This strategy will support the recovery of the tourism sector, setting out how Stoke-on-Trent can build back better post the pandemic. The actions will generate additional income to the area through visitor spend and economic impact/secondary spend.</p>
	<p>Deliver a wide range of commercial services and invest to enable the city to prosper</p>	<p>As an income generating section within the City Council, this strategy will assist the Visitor Economy Team (Visit Stoke) to continue to grow its income which will enable the delivery of the service to promote Stoke-on-Trent to the visitor market and to support the tourism sector.</p>
<p>Work with our communities to make them healthier, safer and more sustainable</p>	<p>Work with residents and partners to make our communities safer, cleaner and healthier</p>	<p>This strategy highlights the social and economic value of Stoke-on-Trent's culture, heritage, and leisure assets, including our green spaces, landscapes and waterways. In this way, the strategy will help our city, as well as visitors, to appreciate and value the natural and cultural treasures that exist in our local communities.</p>



# 3

## BACKGROUND – ABOUT THIS STRATEGY

This refreshed Visitor Economy Strategy (VES) sets out a vision and high-level actions for the period 2022-2027.

It is a strategic document setting out how Stoke-on-Trent can build back better post the pandemic in a way that reflects the evolving tourism and cultural landscape.

### The Brief

In 2021, Stoke-on-Trent City Council commissioned Blue Sail Tourism Consultancy to review and assess the destination, its markets and progress since the last VES to inform a new ambitious and aspirational vision which sits alongside some medium-term action plans.

### The Evidence Base

This strategy draws on extensive research undertaken to inform the way forward. As part of this project, Blue Sail has:

- Collated and analysed national and regional tourism and other relevant data
- Reviewed tourism market segments and trends on changing visitor behaviour emerging from the pandemic
- Reviewed relevant policies including progress from the last VES
- Identified and looked at examples of best practice from competing destinations
- Consulted and engaged with key stakeholders including running a stakeholder workshop
- Analysed and reviewed the tourism product and infrastructure
- Considered the different roles of all of the organisations involved in tourism

### About this strategy

The strategy is cognisant of the emerging trends as the world re-emerges from the Covid pandemic and periods of lockdown. These trends are about a 'new normal' – where greener and more mindful priorities work harmoniously alongside economic growth.

For tourism that means sustainable growth that plays to the natural assets of Stoke-on-Trent as much as the urban and heritage experiences. It means:

- encouraging more staying visits and driving business year-round.
- making the most of what Stoke-on-Trent has to offer, developing new experiences that strengthen the appeal of the city and focussing on the basics, driving forward a quality experience.
- a strong partnership – between the private and public sector as well as with neighbouring destinations. It is about unlocking the creativity and resourcefulness of the industry behind some common aims.

This strategy represents a new vision, focus and way of working.

## Where are we now

The review, consultation and analysis uncovered a number of key findings that influence the recommendations.

This VES starts from a strong base...

with **5.5m** visitors and **£365m** of impact

there is lots that is going well.

However, with **96%** of visitors just coming for the day, the impact from the visitors attracted is relatively low.

# ...but is it

there is a depth to the ceramics offer with a wide variety of experiences, it is difficult to differentiate the experiences with too much choice.

## Culture and tourism have developed successfully...

Festivals, events, family attractions, museums, culture and heritage have all been developing and improving their offer. Culture and tourism are natural bedfellows and benefit local communities as well as helping to attract and satisfy visitors.

## Green and blue spaces have untapped potential...

The canals offer great potential to act as a network that connects the dispersed visitor experiences, towns and green spaces. With an increasing focus on wellbeing and being active outdoors as well as ever increasing expectations of sustainable destinations, there is real potential to create new experiences using these assets.

## 4% of visitors generate 12% of the impact...

Staying visitors are important because they spend more and that spend results in bigger impacts for businesses and the local community. There is room to grow the accommodation within the City as the demand for visitor accommodation develops as a result of this plan.



ons that follow:



## The city is known for **ceramics**

it is hugely valuable that Stoke-on-Trent is known for ceramics. Awareness of many destinations is inherently low among prospective visitors. Research has shown that visitors select destinations based on shortlists that they can easily bring to mind. Being known for something helps overcome the initial obstacle of 'awareness'.

## **t enough...**

ty of museums and attractions. However, it can be n similarity between what is on offer.

### **The evening offer needs to develop...**

visitors are sophisticated and used to lively, safe and animated evening options in the towns and cities they visit. While there has been progress in developing the evening offer, more needs to be done to create a distinctive and high-quality offer for visitors perhaps making more creative use of former industrial spaces.

### **Access and orientation is not easy...**

the polycentric nature of Stoke-on-Trent makes it difficult for first time visitors to understand and find their way around. Improving access and orientation for visitors (especially those with disabilities) will help strengthen the experience.

### **The best thing about Stoke-on-Trent is its people...**

time and again this project heard and experienced friendly and welcoming local communities. This inherent friendliness is an enormous strength and an asset.





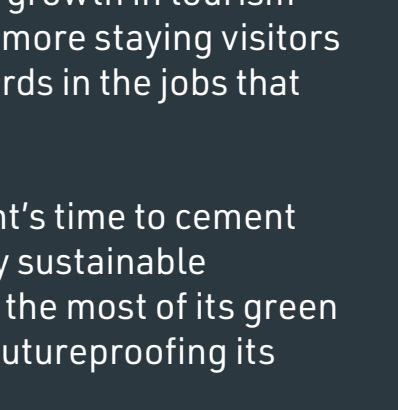
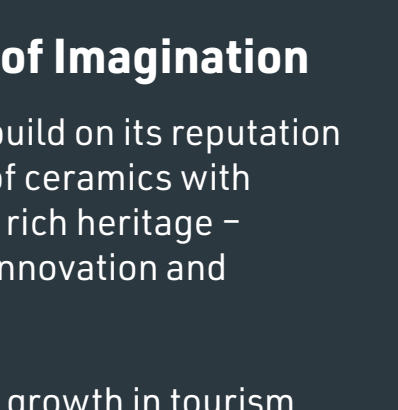
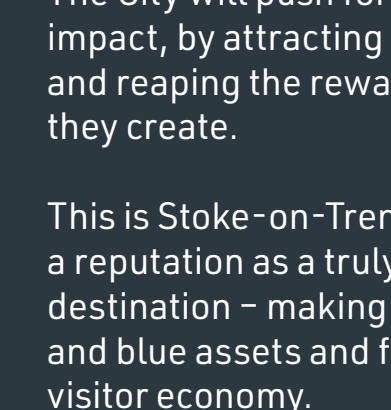
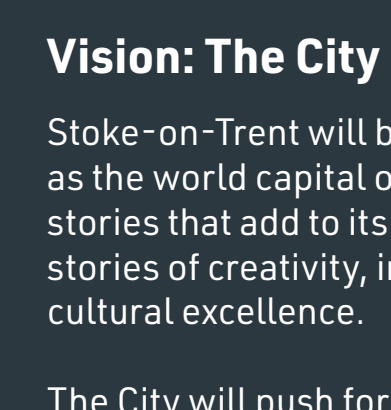
## Vision: The City of Imagination

Stoke-on-Trent will build on its reputation as the world capital of ceramics with stories that add to its rich heritage – stories of creativity, innovation and cultural excellence.

The City will push for growth in tourism impact, by attracting more staying visitors and reaping the rewards in the jobs that they create.

This is Stoke-on-Trent's time to cement a reputation as a truly sustainable destination – making the most of its green and blue assets and futureproofing its visitor economy.

The City's visitor offer will become more appealing for the markets attracted with new and improved reasons to visit and a higher quality of supporting experiences. Local communities will join with visitors in becoming ambassadors for a renewed Stoke-on-Trent.





# 4

## THE VISION

The vision for this strategy is ambitious, aspirational and inspirational. It is also pragmatic, building on the foundations that are already in place, the established visitor offer and existing markets.

There are a number of fundamental criteria which must be kept in mind when implementing this vision and the associated actions. The need to:

- Be distinct – use ceramics as part of a contemporary offer with wide market appeal
- Drive overnights – keep visitors sticky with high quality experiences and a rounded offer
- Be authentic – develop 'only here' experiences which can also appeal to local audiences
- Seek out advocates – locals and visitors who will talk the destination up
- Connect emotionally with visitors – experiences must be more than a simple transaction
- Ensure 'Drive' exceeds 'Drag' – make certain good news and positive developments outweigh negative

### What is the prize?

This vision and the actions in this VES have the potential to bring significant and positive impacts for Stoke-on-Trent. The prize for Stoke-on-Trent over the next 5 years is:

- £100m of additional tourism impact
- 2,000 additional jobs across the tourism sector
- 10% of visitors to Stoke-on-Trent now stay at least 1 night
- A growing national reputation

These impacts are significant enough to justify further and sustained investment in destination development and marketing.

This refreshed Visitor Economy Strategy has a number of actions to deliver the vision and growth projections, categorised as follows:

- 1. Growth Projects** – new areas of tourism development
- 2. Brilliant Basics** – cementing the quality of the visitor experiences
- 3. Momentum Projects** – progressing large scale regeneration projects and accelerating the focus on business tourism.



Alongside this VES, the Creative City Partnership has brought together local, regional and national cultural partners and stakeholders to develop a refreshed Cultural Strategy for the city for 2022-28. This strategy will be used to build upon Stoke-on-Trent's strong cultural and heritage offer and unlock the potential of creativity and culture to transform a wide range of outcomes for local residents, communities and artists. The Cultural Strategy aligns and the VES both feature the shared key aim of transforming Stoke-on-Trent into an important cultural destination.

With Culture at the heart of the Government's Levelling Up policy agenda and with considerable emphasis being placed on the importance of cultural placemaking to transform the attractiveness of less affluent places, Stoke-on-Trent will strive to maximise the unique opportunities which culture can influence in outcome areas such as education, economic development, skills, health and wellbeing.

Working in partnership with Stoke Creates (Stoke-on-Trent's Cultural Compact), Stoke-on-Trent is currently progressing an application to become a designated World Craft Council (WCC) Craft City. This innovative and unique network will provide Stoke-on-Trent with further opportunities to:

- highlight, on a global platform, the reputation and assets of Stoke-on-Trent in a specific craft field, for example in ceramics
- strengthen local potential for innovation and the development of creative tourism
- promote the exchange of know-how, experiences and best practices in diverse craft fields, at the national, regional and international level
- create new opportunities for co-operation and partnership between the designated creative craft cities.

Alongside this, being part of the World Craft Council network (WCC) will also bring a complementary contribution to the UNESCO Creative Cities programme and foster interaction between crafts and other creative industries.



# 5

## POSITIONING & MARKET FOCUS

### Market Focus

Visit Stoke (Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Visitor Economy Team) and the tourism industry more widely must be clear about the city's target markets; those which have the strongest growth potential.

Existing Markets for Stoke-on-Trent are predominantly domestic. Repeat visits are high and they travel a relatively short drivetime, from surrounding 'heart of the country' counties. These visitors don't really know what the city has to offer beyond being known for pottery and ceramics and a couple of stand-out nearby attractions. Stoke-on-Trent consistently exceeds visitor expectations, suggesting that it is a bit of an unknown destination and expectations are generally low.

There are four segments, identified as a good match for Stoke-on-Trent. They are predominantly domestic, aligning with existing markets and capitalising on Post-Covid staycation behaviours.

#### CULTURAL BOOMERS

- Profile – Predominantly couples, well-educated and well-travelled, inspired by cultural in-depth experiences, high expectations.
- Rationale – Will stay for short breaks if the offer is right and will spend if the quality is right.

#### FAMILY DAYTRIPPERS & OVERNIGHTERS

- Profile – Couples in 20s and 30s with children <14, looking for child focused entertainment on weekends and school holidays, value for money.
- Rationale – propensity to convert from day visits to overnights (1+) if there is enough to fill their time enjoyably.

#### DAYS OUT WITH FRIENDS

- Profile – Typically 50+, from within 1 hour drivetime, looking for value for money, balance of fun and learning something new.
- Rationale – Will visit outside of peak times (mid-week and off season).

#### BUSINESS & CONFERENCE VISITORS

- Profile – Looking for quality business meeting, conference and training spaces and facilities within 30-50 mile radius of base, looking for balance of value for money and something distinctive.
- Rationale – Typically visit mid-week, will explore leisure offer too.



## Positioning

Stoke-on-Trent should be positioned to resonate meaningfully and emotionally with its priority markets. The positioning should convey an image that is then delivered in quality experiences.

The city benefits from being known nationally and internationally as the world capital of ceramics but this does not translate well into an experience-led proposition that will inspire its target markets to visit. The current positioning, conveyed on the Visit Stoke website is "Stoke-on-Trent is a unique city affectionately known as The Potteries. We are a creative city that makes beautiful things. We create art from dirt. We are a place where art, technology and commerce come together through craftsmanship. We are the World Capital of Ceramics".

A strong, new proposition for Stoke-on-Trent will be built around The Power of Imagination that is so fundamental within the ceramics industry - "creating art from dirt".

It is a concept that is born of, and builds on, Stoke-on-Trent's ceramics heritage and which ties into the city's strong cultural offer and creative vibe. It is distinctive both in the UK and internationally and appeals to the post-Covid trends of the pursuit of wellbeing and the revival of arts and crafts. It has the potential to resonate with all target markets in an emotional and meaningful way. This offers a significant opportunity for Stoke-on-Trent, with its pottery museums, family attractions, cultural events, and green and blue spaces, to become 'the City of Imagination' - a distinctive position which connects emotionally with visitors, unites its six towns and gives a base on which to build marketing activity and product development, and which appeals to travellers post-Covid.



# 6

## STRATEGIC FOCUS – GROWTH PROJECTS

### Canals & Green Spaces

Greenways and blueways have emerged as important international tourism experiences with significant investment in the network of cycling and walking trails that connect tourism attractions and which have become experiences in their own right.

Stoke-on-Trent has an extensive network of waterways that join up many of the heritage attractions, towns and existing green spaces. They also connect the city with its rural landscapes. The opportunity is to convert these towpaths into a high quality visitor experience - with great infrastructure (surfaces), supporting businesses (bike hire, cafes etc), animation with site specific art and sculpture and interpretation of the heritage and natural experiences of Stoke.

New blueways and greenways benefit visitors and local communities and respond to the wellbeing and sustainability aspiration of these audiences. Developing them will require a strong partnership between the public and private sector as well as the Canal & River Trust.







## Mass Participation & Active Events

The strategy identifies that developing mass participation and active events has advantages for destinations: they repeat and build impacts from one year to the next; they respond to the increasing appeal of active lifestyles (cycling, walking, running); and they can operate outside peak visitor periods so help balance tourism in a destination.

With careful planning they can result in significant numbers of staying visitors. In-person event number collection, for example, can convert many thousands of bed nights.

The city is home to two professional Football League teams. Stoke City Football Club in the South of the City and Port Vale in the North and has some great spaces for outdoor events. Existing events (e.g. The Potters Arf) should be supported to grow and organisers attracted to consider developing new events in the destination given the excellent catchment and good transport links.

It is important to support organisers with in-kind assistance (e.g. road closures, traffic management, cleansing etc) while ensuring that the events are 'distinctly Stoke' for participants offering an experience they can't get anywhere else.



## Evening Economy

For staying visitors, a dynamic and animated evening economy adds significantly to the overall enjoyment of the destination. While the offer in Stoke-on-Trent has moved on in recent years with new hotels, independent restaurants, and 5 theatres it still lacks the attractiveness of competitor destinations.

Baltic Market Liverpool, Big Feed Glasgow and Shelter Hall Brighton are examples of independent street food markets recently opened in formerly redundant or industrial settings. Vienna has pop-up restaurants operating in city attractions and museums when they are closed in the evening. The city has outstanding heritage attractions that close for the evening and a wide range of redundant industrial premises that have the potential to be used more productively.

The development of the food and drink offer in Stoke could use land around the Canals. Creating pop-up experiences in heritage attractions and creating some destination dining experiences would strengthen the appeal for visitors persuaded to stay.







## Family Attractions

Stoke-on-Trent already benefits from nearby family attractions such as Alton Towers, Trentham Estate and the Peak District. These generate a significant number of bed nights. Strengthening the family offer in the city would help add to the existing appeal – turning day visits into staying and 1-night stays into 2-nights. Indoor family attractions would also grow the 'rainy-day' offer and help extend the season.

Stoke-on-Trent should support and encourage the development of existing family attractions – working with them to support their planning and development aspirations.

The City will identify potential development sites and market these to developers for family-led attractions and mixed-use development.



## Culture & Festivals

Stoke-on-Trent has strong cultural programming and a diverse range of festivals and events and it will continue to work with existing providers to strengthen their reach and impact in the visitor economy.

The City is also fortunate in having a number of larger venues including two stadia and large green spaces. These spaces are already used for large scale events (mainly music) and support should be given to the commercial stadia to expand the programming of entertainment. Development of new programming should 'design in' ways of converting ticket sales to staying visitors by developing packages and promotions with accommodation providers.

Multi-day events are particularly attractive in helping keep visitors in the local area. Large outdoor stadia in a post-pandemic world also have advantages over traditional indoor venues while having much of the necessary infrastructure already built in.



# 7

## STRATEGIC FOCUS – BRILLIANT BASICS

Brilliant Basics are about ensuring that Stoke-on-Trent is a well-managed destination. These actions do not attract visitors on their own but if not managed properly, these things can deter visitors for coming or stop them from returning.

### Destination Management

The strategy identifies that it is critical that the needs and voice of the visitor is evident in public policy decision making, positively influencing decisions around transport, waste, development, education and skills among others.

Having a well-managed destination is absolutely vital if Stoke-on-Trent is serious about attracting visitors. Making sure first and last impressions at key gateways are attractive and welcoming will make a big difference. For example, the development of the 'Visitor Welcome Programme' to ensure front line staff have sufficient destination knowledge, relevant training and skills. Improved accessibility for disabled visitors and the recording of such information all need to work seamlessly. These destination hygiene factors are increasingly vital in a post-pandemic

### Sustainable & Responsible

There is a need to embed stronger sustainability credentials across the tourism industry. Done well this can really help connect visitors to the place – it's people, culture, food, businesses and communities.

This requires sustained action by the public and private sector and there is a need to understand the baseline impact now. From that will flow a wide range of initiatives within the sector – from energy and water conservation to local sourcing and supplies, from recycling to improving natural habitats.

### Research & Insights

Work undertaken as part of this strategy has highlighted the importance of understanding visitors and their needs and of having a robust assessment of the current performance of tourism in Stoke-on-Trent. This includes hotel studies, economic impact/ performance studies and visitor surveys. It is critical that this insight is shared with the tourism industry so they can act on it alongside public sector leaders.



## Sector Leadership

The tourism industry partners in Stoke-on-Trent needs to work closely with the City Council on delivering a strong welcome, supporting destination management and using the destination positioning in their own marketing activity.

It takes time and effective leadership to be able to bring the sector together. To organise and manage an industry network collaborating on marketing and development projects.

## Positioning & Marketing

To increase the impact of Visit Stoke's marketing activity and to bring the city positioning to life:

### Industry Engagement

The new city positioning is being driven by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, but it will not succeed without the commitment of the wider tourism industry to this fresh approach. It will be the City Council's role to:

- Work-up the refreshed positioning statement building on 'the power of imagination'.
- Identify routes and channels to communicate and reinforce the positioning and target markets, influencing key internal and external stakeholders to accept, adopt and use it.
- Develop and deliver an engagement programme with the tourism industry and wider sector to disseminate and encourage use of the positioning starting with the big players e.g. World of Wedgwood, Trentham Estate, etc.
- Use the refreshed positioning statement in future tourism development initiatives including the creation of new visitor-facing marketing messages and content for roll out across owned marketing channels (online and print) and in new product development initiatives.
- Build in the target market profiles and renewed positioning to future asset collection e.g. visitor research, photo and video shoots.





### Consolidate Print

Visit Stoke will review the current suite of printed collateral and consolidate to one or two pieces of key print to free up time, capacity and resource for more digitally-based promotion opportunities and to curate more stories.

### Curated Stories

Provide a storytelling "stage" on the Visit Stoke website for others to "act" on and move the destination marketing from broadcasting Visit Stoke outputs to being a curator of others' stories, shifting from "one voice" to "many voices". Contributors could include travel writers, bloggers, students, experts (e.g. chefs, artists), photographers, museum curators.

Tactics will include:

- Blogs – curated for theme and tone with guidance for contributors; featured in the main navigation of the website; published frequently; on a simple URL e.g. [visitstoke.co.uk/blog](http://visitstoke.co.uk/blog)
- User Generated Content – shared via social channels; integrated into websites; incentivised use of hashtags e.g. share your #CityofImagination inspiration
- Third Party Content – integrated into websites; shared via social channels.



# 8

## STRATEGIC FOCUS – MOMENTUM PROJECTS

There are a number of projects (underway or on the horizon) which will have a very positive impact on Stoke-on-Trent's tourism potential.

This strategy is fully behind these projects.

### Goods Yard, Etruscan Square (Arena Plans) and the Spode Village

A great deal of time, energy and investment has gone into emerging plans for some major regeneration projects across Stoke-on-Trent. These have the potential to be game-changers – to provide facilities that will underpin growth of the visitor economy; to improve orientation and access; to improve welcome and gateways and enhance connections to the canals. They also lift the urban fabric making Stoke-on-Trent a more pleasant environment and provide spaces for business to grow and develop.

The Goods Yard is a project which will make Stoke-on-Trent proud and create a neighbourhood with real identity, one that nods to the city's rich heritage but writes a new, exciting chapter. The design includes a nod to the railway heritage of the site, with rail-like paths meandering through lush green planters. The Goods Yard will offer shops, bars, cafes, businesses and green outdoor spaces for residents and visitors to utilise as well as flexible space for pop-up markets and live music. Located next to Stoke-on-Trent train station and on the doorstep of the University Quarter including Staffordshire University with their new Catalyst event space, the Trent and Mersey Canal and the A500 the Goods Yard will provide a multi-use space to attract visitors both regionally and nationally.





Etruscan Square will be a large City Centre regeneration scheme, backed by the £20 million investment from the Government's Levelling Up Fund. Planned to feature a 3,600 capacity arena, 285 high quality residential units, 82,000 sq ft of commercial space and a 138-bed hotel. A brand new 701-space multi-storey car park will also be built. With a name that celebrates Stoke-on-Trent's past but also inspires hope and confidence for the future, and linking it to one of Stoke-on-Trent's most famous sons 'Josiah Wedgwood' certainly does that. Etruscan Square will be a brand that people will instantly recognise and remember, and become a new chapter for the city. In addition, also to explore plans to develop the museum offer further in the City and potentially develop an International Centre for Ceramics.

The Spode Village is already becoming an established location for leisure and creative activity with a dedicated museum, hotel, event space, restaurant and artist studios already on-site. Advanced plans are underway to bring forward additional mixed-use development and community event spaces.

There are many factors beyond this VES which will determine how or when these projects are delivered. However, it will be important to factor in the needs of visitors to the detailed plans as they emerge.







## Business Tourism

Through the Staffordshire Stoke-on-Trent Conference Bureau, there has already been significant countywide partnership work to support the growth and development of business tourism and events.

There is a need to strengthen relationships with the Universities, other partnerships and initiatives such as the Silicon Stoke prospectus to leverage support for growing business visits and events in Stoke-on-Trent.

Conferences and meetings are important as they come at a time of the week and year that complement leisure tourism; they are high value in terms of the impact they create; and business visitors can often return as leisure visitors.

Stoke-on-Trent already has some strong facilities and venues and there is further potential to make the most of these by working collaboratively to generate and convert leads and enquiries. Active sales among agencies, marketing through industry events and development of tools (bid documents) will all help the Conference Bureau achieve more enquiries and bookings.

Partnership and collaboration is important and forming a Conference Bureau group that meets regularly to plan sales and marketing activity and develop bidding capability will be continued.



# 9

## DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

This VES sets out a clear vision, positioning and ambitious proposals to take the visitor economy forward. This will require capacity but there are resources across the private and public sector which can be brought together to take forward projects.

The city will provide the political leadership to ensure the interests of visitors are represented in important policy decisions, and organisational leadership to coral the tourism industry and private sector interests.

While there is no 'cookie cutter' model for the perfect tourism partnership, there is a noticeable trend towards larger tourism organisations. The specific form that collaboration takes varies across England, determined by past experiences, current arrangements, destination needs and political will.

The recent DCMS review of DMOs has recommended that larger groupings of destinations come together to tackle destination management and development needs acknowledging that existing fragmentation inhibits growth. A proposed national structure of tiered DMOs with accreditation and funding support from DCMS sits at the heart of the recommendations.







Image courtesy of Mick Hall

This does not imply any diminishing of identity in marketing delivery but highlights the need for partnership in activity which addresses common issues and opportunities. The involvement of the private sector alongside the public sector in delivering future DMOs is another expectation arising from the review and may have implications for the transition to more formal DMO arrangements in Stoke-on-Trent.

In the Action Plan, one of the first tasks is to determine priorities and look at resourcing and delivery implications. In many cases, actions will benefit local communities as well as visitors so taking these projects forward requires a pan-authority approach that spans different departments.

While local authority resources remain under pressure, this VES and Action Plan are the mechanism by which the authority will look to use discretionary and grant funding to support revenue and capital projects. This might include existing funding streams such as Future High Street, Levelling Up Funding, Covid Recovery Funding as well as support from the LEP, Midlands Engine and any future funding allocations that may for example arise from the recent DCMS review of DMOs and the Comprehensive Spending Review. Funding will also be sought from organisations such as VisitEngland via opportunities like the Discover England Fund and Arts Council England. While we recognise changes to DMO's this new Visitor Economy Strategy is robust and sustainable in its own right.

Within the following pages, the action plan indicates those areas where resource/funding in some form is already secured. Those shown in green indicate an existing or confirmed resource is in place, though an approach to do things differently may be required. Relationships are in place to progress many of the identified opportunities. Those in blue have funding/resource requirements to be identified or agreed via external funding bodies, partnership work and other opportunities.

# 10

## ACTION PLAN

The Visitor Economy Strategy will be reviewed and updated annually to reflect the changing tourism landscape both locally and nationally.

### Key

An existing or confirmed resource is in place, though an approach to do things differently may be required. Relationships in place to progress activity.



Funding/resource requirements to be identified or agreed via external funding bodies, partnership work and other opportunities.



### Growth Projects and Ambitions

Canals & Green Spaces	Who	Period
Undertake Greenway feasibility study - scoping the costs and potential for developing a comprehensive greenway along the canals connecting the city with the main attractions. Identify untapped opportunities to bring heritage assets and green spaces together to complement their visitor offer.	City Council and Canal & River Trust (Lead Partners) and the Creative City Partnership plus relevant Private Sector	2022-2024
Business case development – including the costs and supporting infrastructure, legal requirements and funding.	City Council & Partners	2023-2024
Construct the greenway – phased development with priority sections linked to other development e.g. Goods Yard	Canal & River Trust and City Council	2024-2026
Develop the greenway as a tourism resource with animation along the route including sculpture, watersport activity, food and drink and support for new business including watersport and cycle hire.	City Council & Partners	2025-2027

Mass Participation & Active	Who	Period
Strengthen existing mass-participation events to build critical mass of visiting participants – planning and promotions to increase volume of staying visits. Strengthen positioning of events to ensure they offer something distinctly 'Stoke-on-Trent'.	Event Organisers, City Council and Partners such as SOT BID	2022-2024
Identify new signature mass participation events (e.g. Marathon, Tri, Cyclo sportive) and identify organisers that could be supported to plan and deliver events at zero cost to the council (after year 2) beyond support for road closures, waive fees for land hire, waste management etc.	City Council & Event Organisers, Public & Private Sector Partners	2024 - 2026





Evening Economy	Who	Period
<p>Identify sites/locations where pockets of evening experience can be improved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In existing town centres or currently redundant spaces in interesting settings e.g. canalside, industrial etc.</li> <li>Consider use of pop-up experiences to animate and evidence what a high quality evening offer could deliver. Explore examples such as Sea Lanes Brighton, Level 1 Worthing and Stack Newcastle to illustrate best practice.</li> </ul>	City Council (Lead) Tourism Businesses, Heritage Partners and SOT BID	2022-2025
<p>Market locations to operators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the permissions process (planning and licensing)</li> <li>Work with the operator to develop a high-quality experience which can function year round.</li> <li>Animate these spaces with live entertainment.</li> </ul>	Business, City Council Creative, Cultural and Tourism Partners	2022-2023
<p>Unusual dining - work with existing heritage attractions to pilot operating as evening pop-up food/drink/entertainment venues.</p>	Heritage Attractions, City Council working with Private Sector	2023-2024

Family Attractions	Who	Period
<p>Support the continued development of existing family attractions in and near Stoke-on-Trent. Work with operators to understand their development plans and encourage quality improvements that enhance the offer and lead to an increase in staying visits (converting day to 1-night).</p>	City Council (Lead) Tourism Businesses and Appropriate Developers	2022-2024
<p>Establish new family attractions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify suitable sites for potential development of new family attractions.</li> <li>Market sites to family leisure operators to expand the range and quality of family attractions on offer.</li> <li>Target 1-2 new indoor family attractions.</li> </ul>	City Council, Private Landowners and Attraction Operators	2024-2027

Events & Festivals	Who	Period
<p>Commercial Stadia Concerts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of stadium (touring) music concerts.</li> <li>• Work with the stadia (Bet365 and Vale Park) to develop their programming.</li> <li>• Build staying visitor benefits alongside concert ticket sales.</li> <li>• Target 4-6 new concerts.</li> </ul>	Stadia Operators and Promoters, Transport and Accommodation Partners, Wider Destination Partners	2023-2026
<p>Impactful Cultural Events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with existing cultural providers to think beyond 'local' and develop programming which will appeal to and attract visitors from further afield.</li> </ul>	Cultural Partners and Creative Sector	2022-2024
<p>Use of heritage assets, museums, markets and green spaces to accommodate a wider range and new opportunities for cultural events, music and activity in underutilised spaces to reach new audiences both locally and nationally.</p>	City Council, Private Promoters, Cultural and Creative Partners	2022-2024
<p>Explore potential use of heritage and other assets (e.g. empty retail units) as 'pop up' cultural spaces for visual arts and performance as identified in the Cultural Strategy.</p>	City Council, Culture and Heritage Partners	

## Brilliant Basics

Destination Management	Who	Period
<p>Identify 'drag' factors for visitors to the City (waste, transport, orientation etc) – things that hold the visitor experience back.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake regular economic impact assessments/ performance studies.</li> <li>• Develop an action plan and engage with relevant departments to influence plans and resources to meet visitor needs.</li> </ul>	City Council	2023-2024
<p>Development of a Visitor Welcome Programme – bringing culture and tourism partners together to maximise knowledge. Collaboration between the sectors whilst improving the visitor experience and maximising dwell time in the city.</p>	City Council, Tourism Partners Cultural and Creative Partners	2022 - 2023
<p>Shared insight with the tourism industry to encourage them to act on evidence alongside public sector leaders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commissioning of regular research; hotel studies, perception, product audit.</li> </ul>	Canal & River Trust and City Council	2024-2026



<b>Sustainable &amp; Responsible</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Period</b>
Baseline sustainability of existing tourism offer using green destinations or similar.	City Council and Universities	2023-2024
Establish a Sustainable Tourism Project Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Made up of the public and private sector (tourism)</li> <li>Prepare actions based on the baseline.</li> <li>Develop guidance for tourism businesses to improve their sustainability credentials working with organisations such as Green Tourism</li> </ul>	Tourism Businesses & City Council	2023-2025
Monitor progress against the baseline and plans and consider accreditation (e.g. Global destination Sustainability Index) as a badge for the destination.	City Council	2026

<b>Research &amp; Insights</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Period</b>
Undertake visitor surveys to support destination baseline for the sustainability projects and visitor experience of Stoke.	City Council working with tourism partners	2023 onwards
Continue to undertake economic impact assessments. Purchase accommodation performance data (e.g. STR global) to monitor progress (using staying visitors and spend as a proxy performance measure for the destination).	City Council working with tourism partners	2022 onwards
Develop and present an annual research and performance report to tourism businesses.	City Council working with tourism partners	2023 onwards

<b>Sector Leadership</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Period</b>
Develop an annual membership/partnership scheme for tourism businesses and use this to create a closer working relationship and business buy-in.	City Council (Tourism) Tourism Businesses	2022 onwards
Plan a programme of regular industry communications (annual meeting, advice and guidance, research, communications). Establish sub-groups e.g. Conference Bureau, Attractions, Accommodation to work on and support VES projects	City Council (Tourism) Tourism Businesses	2022 onwards
Develop a Network of Museums (NOM) to allow for more collaborative working across the city's museums and to maximise opportunities to work together and place make.	City Council Museums and other local museums.	2022 – 2023

Positioning	Who	Period
Work up the refreshed positioning statement building on the concept 'the power of imagination'	City Council Tourism	2022-2023
Identify the routes and channels to communicate and reinforce the refreshed positioning and target markets, influencing key internal and external stakeholders to accept, adopt and use it.	City Council Tourism (Lead) Tourism Businesses	2022-2023
Develop and deliver an engagement programme with the tourism industry and wider sector to disseminate and encourage use of the positioning starting with the big players e.g. World of Wedgwood, Trentham Gardens, Alton Towers, Hilton hotels, etc.	City Council Tourism (Lead) Tourism Businesses	2022 – 2024
Use the refreshed positioning statement in future tourism development initiatives, including the creation of new visitor-facing marketing messages and content for roll out across owned marketing channels (online and print) and in new product development initiatives.	City Council Tourism (Lead) Tourism Businesses	2022 onwards
Build in the target market profiles and renewed positioning to future visitor research and photoshoots.	City Council Tourism	2023 onwards

Marketing Delivery	Who	Period
Commission a series of curated blogs that will appeal to target markets, thematically and tonally, attributing each blog to the writer, using their name and a short biography (can be City Council Tourism staff as well as third parties). Feature them prominently across all digital owned channels.	City Council (Tourism) and Tourism Partners	2022 onwards
Integrate more third party content into official destination digital channels e.g. profile the Instagram feed of a business website on the Visit Stoke website, share the content of Stoke and Staffordshire businesses on the Visit Stoke social media feeds and via other relevant websites such as Event Stoke Spaces and Places.	City Council (Tourism) and Tourism Partners	2023 onwards
Share more user-generated content on Visit Stoke social channels and start a conversation with social media followers through the use of a hashtag e.g. #MyStokeStory or #CityofImagination, giving a steer on what needs to be created or shared.	City Council (Tourism)	2022 onwards
Review effectiveness of current suite of printed collateral and consolidate to one or two pieces of key print to free up time, capacity and resource for more digitally-based promotion opportunities.	City Council (Tourism)	2022 onwards



## Momentum Projects

Business Tourism	Who	Period
Grow and develop the Conference Bureau group (post pandemic) – meet 2x/year to agree sales and marketing plans and to identify support needed for event bidding. Identify and organise relevant training events for the group.	City Council (Tourism) CB Partner Businesses	2022 onwards

Capital Development Projects *Goods Yard and Etruscan Square	Who	Period
Present VES requirements to regeneration and major projects colleagues to input thinking in the early stage of project plans. Drive out benefits from these projects that maximise outcomes sought (staying visits, improved welcome etc) and ensure the 'voice of the visitor' is represented.	City Council, Investors and Developers	2022 onwards
Investigate further opportunities around the development of Stoke Town Heritage Action Zone and the Spode Site as a cultural and creative space. In line with the Cultural Strategy, use heritage-led regeneration to transform places and boost economic development.	City Council and Developers	2022 - 2024





City of  
**Stoke-on-Trent**