

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

**CABINET- 4 FEBRUARY 2008**

### **EAST AYRSHIRE TOURISM STRATEGY - THE WAY AHEAD: 2009-2015**

#### **Report by Depute Chief Executive/ Executive Director of Corporate Support**

## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1** To seek Cabinet approval for the East Ayrshire Tourism Strategy and Action Plan and accompanying Environmental Report to be published in draft and proceed to full public consultation as required by Section 16 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** Preparation and development of the Tourism Strategy has been led by the Planning and Economic Development Division of the Department of Corporate Support, in consultation with the Leisure Services Division of the Department of Neighbourhood Services. It was fully considered by the Corporate Management Team on 30 April 2008 and received endorsement for submission to Cabinet.
- 2.2** On 4 June 2008 Cabinet approved the document, "Tourism: The Way Ahead in East Ayrshire 2008-2015" and the Draft Action Plan, in principle, subject to the outcome of the statutorily required Strategic Environmental Assessment.
- 2.3** Following a full and rigorous Strategic Environmental Assessment process, and the preparation of an Environmental Report, the strategy document has received only minor modifications.
- 2.4** It is considered appropriate to seek Cabinet approval prior to full public consultation as the Environmental Report highlights the potential for significant positive and negative environmental impacts.

## **3 BACKGROUND OF THE TOURISM STRATEGY**

- 3.1** The Scottish Executive published its policy document for the development of the tourism industry in Scotland and set out its strategic ambition for growth in revenue from the industry of 50%, over a ten year period to 2015.
- 3.2** The tourism industry is important to the economy of East Ayrshire, generating around £56 million per year in tourism revenue and there is considerable potential to grow this contribution further.
- 3.3** The tourism product in East Ayrshire includes a range of cultural and visitor attractions, and opportunities for outdoor activities and recreation. East Ayrshire has much more to offer in terms developing tourism as a significant

generator of wealth and employment in the local economy. These attributes include :

- Close proximity to highly populated areas within Scotland;
- Close proximity to Glasgow Prestwick and Glasgow International Airports;
- Good transport links;
- Easily accessible from central Scotland and northern England;
- Scenic quality of rural areas;
- Strong associations with Robert Burns and other Scots of international renown;
- Strong cultural offer in arts and museums; and
- Emerging opportunities arising from Dumfries House and Estate being “saved for the nation” by a consortium led by HRH The Duke of Rothesay and the associated proposal for the development of a “sustainable eco-village” on a site within the Estate, currently referred to as “Knockroon”.

#### **4 THE VISION FOR TOURISM IN EAST AYRSHIRE**

**4.1** Aligning the policy objectives summarised in Section 11 and the positive aspects noted in section 3.3, the following **vision** for tourism in East Ayrshire is proposed:

*“By 2015 East Ayrshire will be an immediately recognisable and even more attractive destination where our industry works together to provide a unique, authentic and accessible tourism experience which focuses on exceeding visitor expectations and delivers tangible benefits to the wealth and wellbeing of local communities.”*

**4.2** The **strategic ambition** is to *grow tourism revenue by 10% in real terms, in East Ayrshire by 2015*. While this may seem a relatively modest target in comparison to the national target of 50% real terms growth in tourism revenue, it is considered that this is a realistic target for sustainable growth, taking into account the fragility of the current economic climate and the level of tourism development required to achieve this growth.

#### **5 THE WAY AHEAD : 2009 to 2015**

**5.1** The document sets out in considerable detail, the background to the tourism industry, the policy context and the challenges which the industry faces. It proposes a strategic framework for the achievement of East Ayrshire

Council's ambition for the development of the tourism industry in the area, based on the following aims:

Aim 1 To establish and work towards a growth ambition and vision for tourism;

Aim 2 To develop an active, connected tourism community;

Aim 3 To develop a framework for research and information monitoring;

Aim 4 To enhance and expand the tourism product;

Aim 5 To improve tourism infrastructure to support the tourism product; and

Aim 6 To proactively market the area as an attractive destination

**5.2** The full document which is attached to this report provides a detailed action plan for each aim, including projected outcomes, timescales and partner involvement.

## **6 PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT**

**6.1** At a strategic level, performance will be measured directly against the ambition of 10% growth in tourism revenues within East Ayrshire by 2015. This will be based on data provided by the Ayrshire and Arran STEAM Report, independently undertaken on an annual basis.

**6.2** Information provided by STEAM has traditionally been on a VisitScotland area network basis (i.e. Ayrshire and Arran), however in future a more detailed analysis at local authority level will be prepared annually to provide baseline data and allow monitoring of key indicators as outlined in the strategy.

## **7 ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT**

**7.1** The Tourism Strategy is likely to have significant environmental impacts as it is a high level strategy that will set a high level framework for future development consent for tourism related projects; therefore, an environmental assessment under Section 5(3) of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act was required.

**7.2** The purpose of the Tourism Strategy's Environmental Report was to identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant impacts on the environment of implementing the Tourism Strategy and the reasonable alternatives, taking account of the objectives and geographical scope of the plan.

**7.3** The Environmental Report assessed the benefits of producing a Tourism Strategy alongside the reasonable alternatives for the Strategy, which were:

- do nothing; or
- produce a strategy with incremental actions; or
- produce a strategy that is all-encompassing.

The assessment concluded that the best environmental option in terms of the need for Tourism Strategy is to produce a Strategy that has incremental actions as this will allow a sustainable approach to the implementation of the Tourism Strategy, enable progress and ensure that the environmental impacts of a small number of actions and outputs are monitored effectively.

- 7.4** The Environmental Report also assessed the aims of the Tourism Strategy against the environmental issues that were scoped into the assessment, namely, biodiversity, water, air quality and cultural heritage. The assessment concluded that the aims of the Tourism Strategy are likely to have very significant positive and/or negative impacts on the environment either through the implementation of the Tourism Strategy or through lower tier plans, programmes and strategies that implement the broad aims or provide further tourism developments, products
- 7.5** The environmental assessment showed that a high number of the actions and associated outputs would have insignificant impacts on the environment. Most of these are procedural in nature. The remainder of the impacts range from low significance to very significant with those impacts likely to have both positive and negative impacts depending on what is proposed and the precise location of the proposal/product etc. However, the assessment has uncovered several actions and outputs that are likely to have negative impacts, which range from low significance to very significant.
- 7.6** Section 19 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires East Ayrshire Council to monitor the negative or significant negative environmental effects of the implementation of the Tourism Strategy to allow any unforeseen adverse effects to be identified at an early stage and remedial action to be undertaken. The monitoring arrangements that will be implemented are to monitor the likely adverse impacts on the environment and will be carried out by various Council Divisions.

## **8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1** On 17 December 2008 Cabinet approved a Service Level Agreement between East Ayrshire Council and VisitScotland for the financial year 2008/09, at a cost of £33,500. This represented a considerable reduction from the 2007/08 contribution of £70,000.
- 8.2** In order that the level of investment in tourism development and promotion is sustained at the 2007/08 level of £70,000, Cabinet authorised the balance of £36,500 to be ring-fenced from within existing resources to form the basis of a dedicated tourism budget within the current financial year.
- 8.3** It is proposed that in future the level of funding for VisitScotland will continue to be governed through a Service Level Agreement, with a separate dedicated budget to aid the delivery of the objectives of the Tourism Strategy.

- 8.4** It is proposed that the Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support be remitted to seek to achieve this from within existing resources, where possible. It should however be noted that as tourism continues to develop and grow within East Ayrshire increased resources may be required to fully meet the actions outlined within the Tourism Strategy.
- 8.5** Businesses operating in the tourism sector will continue to be eligible for loan funding assistance through the West of Scotland Loan Fund, subject to the normal criteria of the Fund.
- 8.6** Section 19 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires East Ayrshire Council to monitor the negative or significant negative environmental effects of the implementation of the Tourism Strategy and the draft monitoring measures will have to be carried out by various Council Divisions, which has a financial implication in terms of staff resources.

## **9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1** The Solicitor to the Council advised that in terms of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005, it was necessary to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment on the tourism strategy.
- 9.2** Following a formal consultation process, responses in relation to the Tourism Strategy and Environmental Report will be considered and, where appropriate, incorporated before the strategy is formally adopted.

## **10 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1** The importance and potential of tourism in East Ayrshire is identified in the East Ayrshire Community Plan, in both the Improving Opportunities Theme and the Improving the Environment Theme.

### **Improving Opportunities**

- Thematic Aim 5 is “to attract investment and increase opportunities in East Ayrshire by developing tourism, culture and leisure, housing and rural diversification”. The specified target is to increase tourism revenue by 5%, from the 2005/06 baseline position by 2011”.

### **Improving the Environment**

- Thematic Aim 1 is “to regenerate, protect and improve the natural and built environment through sustainable development”; and
- Thematic Aim 8 is “to develop visitor attractions and invest in leisure and cultural activities”.

- 10.2** The Tourism Strategy as described in this report will support the achievement of the objectives of the East Ayrshire Community Plan, as expressed in the Improving Opportunities Theme and the Improving the Environment Theme.

## **11 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 There are no immediate personnel implications.

## **12 RECOMMENDATIONS**

12.1 That the Cabinet:

- (1) Approves the document “East Ayrshire Tourism Strategy - The Way Ahead: 2009-2015” and the accompanying Environmental Report, to be published in draft for public consultation;
- (2) Requests the Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support to bring forward performance monitoring reports on an annual basis;
- (3) Otherwise notes the content of this report.

**ELIZABETH MORTON**

**Depute Chief Executive / Executive Director of Corporate Support**

19 Jan 2009

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

- 1) East Ayrshire Tourism Strategy: The Way Ahead: 2009 – 2015  
**[Available on Members Information Portal]**
- 2) Tourism: The Way Ahead in East Ayrshire 2009-2015 Strategic Environmental Assessment, Environmental Report  
**[Available in Members Lounge]**

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