



<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Destination Management Strategy 2025-2035</b>
<b>Committee Report Submitted To:</b>	Leisure & Development Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	15 October 2024
<b>For Decision or For Information</b>	For Decision
<b>To be discussed In Committee</b>	NO

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)</b>	
Strategic Theme	Accelerating Our Economy and Contributing to Prosperity Protecting and Enhancing our Environments and Assets Promote our tourism offer locally and internationally Prosperity, Health and Wellbeing and Cohesive Community.
Outcome	Improved access to our natural environment. Development of visitor economy and health and wellbeing opportunities
Lead Officer	Head of Tourism and Recreation

<b>Budgetary Considerations</b>	
Cost of Proposal	£40,000
Included in Current Year Estimates	<b>YES/NO</b>
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	
Staffing Costs	

<b>Legal Considerations</b>	
Input of Legal Services Required	<b>NO</b>
Legal Opinion Obtained	<b>NO</b>

<b>Screening Requirements</b>	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

## **1.0 Purpose of Report**

**The purpose of the report is to seek Elected Members approval to initiate work on the development of a 10 year Destination Management Strategy for the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area. The Report also seeks Council approval to procure external expertise to assist Council Officers in the preparation of the Strategy.**

## **2.0 Background**

After the reorganisation of Local Government in Northern Ireland, the new Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council produced a Destination Management Strategy to assist the tourism economy through recognising the importance of tourism, how it should be organised, and the role the Council plays through its relationship, engagement and communication with the tourism, hospitality and associated sectors.

The strategy was adopted by Council in 2015 for the period up to and including 2020. At this point, the Tourism and Recreation service expected to develop a new 10-year strategy, however this was postponed for a number of reasons including the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the COVID pandemic, and the delay in completion on the Tourism NI Strategy for Northern Ireland. This meant that Council was unable to develop a strategic approach that aligns with the overall direction of travel from the National Tourism Organisation (NTO).

## **3.0 Remit/Scope**

The management of the Destination Management function sits within the Tourism and Recreation Department. Its aim is to ensure a high-quality visitor experience and economic return. This role includes the coordination and management of the development, marketing, trade support and visitor servicing activities relating to tourism destination management. Development and delivery of a broad range of tourism development projects have taken place that have a strong, positive and sustainable benefit for the local economy and community.

The Tourism and Recreation team sits within the Leisure and Development Directorate with the key service areas of Tourism and Destination Management, Coast and Countryside Management, Holiday and Leisure Park Management and the Tourism Events Management. This service aims to align with Council's Corporate Objectives through best practice in destination and outdoor recreational management, whereby Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council will support and work in partnership with the statutory, voluntary, community and private sector to develop and sustain the region as a high quality recreational and visitor destination for the benefit of the area's residents, the business sector and visitors hosted within our community.

The above functions are managed within Council's strategic and operational goals and their successful delivery sits within the context of a challenging change environment and prescriptive budgetary constraints.

Within the Council's vision and allowing for constraints, the Council's Destination remit strives to make the most of our natural assets whilst providing inclusive customer focused, innovative services, to shape Causeway Coast and Glens area for residents, workers and visitors.

The remit crosses into a wide range of stakeholders and influencers, both within, and external to, the structure of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council. Public services, transport infrastructure, public amenities etc all have either a direct or indirect role in developing and sustaining a quality destination experience.

#### **4.0 Need for Destination Management Strategy**

In 2023 the value of overnight stays to our local economy was £204 million (these are NISRA statistics and exclude the value of day trips to the region).

The tourism and hospitality sector in Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is therefore a significant contributor for the local economy. It is recognised that further opportunities exist to build on the area's strengths, recover some of the lost ground post-COVID 19 and develop a thriving and sustainable tourism industry for the future, creating quality jobs, productivity, a balanced economy and sustainability.

In February 2024, Council responded to the Department for the Economy (DfE) consultation process on the draft Tourism Strategy 2024-2034. It was agreed that a Northern Ireland-wide framework must effectively integrate local, regional and national tourism delivery, and support innovative and sustainable tourism development and growth, whilst enhancing the capacity for wealth and job creation. Within the boundaries of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, a second tier strategic approach is required to support the Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland.

#### **5.0 Management Plan Expectations/Outputs**

A completed Destination Management Plan for the Council area will need to include the following:

- The development of a situational analysis based on information provided in the baseline audit and the review of the current Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland 10-year Plan.
- Comprehensive consultation with the Destination/area's tourism sector and other related sectors, key stakeholders and statutory organisations.
- To provide strategic direction and fit along with a pathway for best fit integration for regional, national and international tourism delivery and in line with the four key priorities as set out by the Department for the Economy in 2024.
- Recommend the best delivery mechanisms necessary for tourism in the Causeway Coast and Glens area destination.
- To develop a vision on how the area takes tourism development and delivery over the next ten years 2025-2035.
- Evaluate existing markets and identify market segments with best potential for growth both within NI, ROI, GB and overseas markets.
- Evaluate the range and type of events currently existing within the Destination and make recommendations for future growth and opportunities for development of new events (a supplementary document currently exists for CCGBC titled Strategic Review of Events and was completed in 2021).
- Develop a series of pro-active interventions in the short, medium and longer term to allow the Council and its tourism stakeholders to realise the strategic vision.
- Provide an assessment on how tourism and associated sectors including the leisure, outdoor recreation, retail and infrastructure etc. can fully realise its economic and employment objectives whilst providing a community focus on regeneration and a sustainable approach to development for the area. (a separate Outdoor Recreation Strategy is being commissioned and findings and recommendations will feed into the new Destination Management Strategy). The Model for delivery should identify the best approach for destination management. Consideration must be taken of how tourism as the interaction between visitors, the industry that serves them, the

community that hosts them and their collective impact on, and response to the environment where it all takes place.

- Identify potential sources of funding to enable implementation of this strategy.
- Ensure influence and alignment takes place with the DfE Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland 10-year Plan.

## **6.0 Next Steps**

The Tourism and Recreation team will start to collate and review information that can assist with the development of a strategic Destination Management Plan. This will include an audit of product, identification of issues and barriers and short-term interventions that fit within the business planning process.

**Annex A** provides a supplementary narrative and introductory rationale for a Strategy and forms the basis for a Terms of Reference to secure external assistance with the development of a strategic document that provides a prescriptive approach to the advancement and development of a 10-year Destination Management Plan, for the benefit of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area.

Subject to Elected Members approval, Officers wish to initiate work on the preparation of the Strategy and, as part of this, procure and appoint suitably qualified external expertise to assist in this process.

## **7.0 Budget**

The estimated cost for appointment of external advice and associated costs is £40,000. It is hoped that procurement and appointment can take place within this current financial year, which will be subject to securing the necessary financial resources in the 2025/2026 rates setting process. In advance of the appointment, Council Officers will start working on the situation analysis and early consultation phases.

## **8.0 Recommendation**

**It is recommended** that the Leisure and Development Committee recommends to Council that:

- Officers initiate the process for the preparation and development of a Destination Management Strategy for the period 2025-2035.
- As detailed in **Annex A**, to proceed with procurement for specialist resource to assist in the development of the Destination Management Strategy. Appointment will be subject to the 2025/2026 rates setting process.

## **Appendix 1 – Supplementary Rationale for Destination Management Strategy**

### **Background**

The Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area extends from the Roe Valley on its western side and eastwards to the Glens of Antrim. Much of the area has a coastal fringe. Rich agricultural countryside features inland along the Bann & Roe valleys. Scenic upland areas include Binevenagh, North Sperrins and the Glens of Antrim. Tourism, outdoor recreation, coast and countryside activities and events play a key role in the development of the local economy within the Council area and is one of Northern Ireland's most important visitor destinations.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council acts as the key administrator for destination management within its Local Authority and is responsible for the coordination and management of the development, marketing, trade support and visitor servicing activities, that relate to tourism destination management. The Council has a Destination Management Strategy and has deferred renewal of this, to ensure that any new Strategy aligns with the 'tier 1' strategic approach set out by The Department for the Economy in conjunction with Tourism Northern Ireland.

### **Proposal**

Council now wishes to define the needs and opportunities, along with priorities and resource requirements through a new Tourism and Destination Management Strategy. Any fresh appraisal will aim to create a framework for tourism and associated sectoral development across the Causeway Coast and Glens area for the next 10 years (2025-2035). This framework must effectively integrate local, regional and national tourism delivery and support innovative and sustainable tourism development and growth, while enhancing capacity for wealth and job creation. The scale and potential of the tourism sector in the Causeway Coast and Glens area makes a strong argument for investing in a strategic approach to ensure delivery of a strong and sustainable economic base for the region, and as an asset to improve the quality of experiences for the people that live in and those who visit the region.

A 10-year Destination Management Strategy and associated action plans will identify the way forward and make precise measurable actions that support development of the wider sector and will include defining for Council, the structural, organisational and investment requirements.

### **Key Growth Barriers in Causeway Coast and Glens**

- Rising labour and material costs
- Staff recruitment and retention (particularly in the tourism and hospitality industries)
- Cost of living crisis
- Sterling devaluation
- Rising rates and rents

- Concerns that the ETA visa will dissuade visitors from choosing Northern Ireland
- Public transport infrastructure in rural areas
- Funding to support strategic tourism events
- Data and insights

### **Opportunities for New Growth and Sustainability**

Tourism is seen as a catalyst to drive economic and social development. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the local tourism industry and economy in the Causeway Coast and Glens. Although some recovery was achieved, a challenge remains to rebuild the tourism economy to the levels of 2019 and grow beyond that. The global sector is competitive, and it is essential that Causeway Coast and Glens maintains its position and share of tourism business in Northern Ireland, and promotes a compelling proposition to develop business from international visitors. Consumer research has told us that travellers' needs and motivations have changed in the past number of years and the destination must appeal to and deliver on those motivations.

### **Vision and Mission**

The Destination Management Strategy should complement the Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland ie act as a year-round world class destination, which is renowned for authentic experiences, landscape, heritage and culture which benefits communities, the economy and the environment, with sustainability at its core.

Possible key themes for consideration include:

- Innovative
- Inclusive
- Sustainable
- Attractive
- Collaborative

The above are the 5 key themes for the Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Other possible priorities/themes include:

- Regional balance
- Productivity
- Good jobs