

DESTINATION MARKETING FOR HEXHAM:

Review and Recommendations

Report to Hexham BID

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INTRODUCTION

This report has been commissioned by Hexham BID in order to inform the destination marketing strand of the BID's work, identified as a priority in the business plan, and to help create a plan for Hexham. The scope of the report is to assess previous research and strategic plans, provide a summary of any actions taken, consider the current context and to make recommendations for marketing the town. It does not however assess the impact or effectiveness of current or past marketing activity.

BACKGROUND

Extensive research was carried out into tourism and its economic impact for ONE North East from 2003-2010, the latter part of this as part of the Market Towns Initiative and Welcome programme. In 2005/06, ONE North East carried out the first region-wide visitor survey to create a baseline profile of tourists to the region, which was repeated in 2008 and again in 2010 to establish any changes in visitor demographics or behaviours. Key objectives of these surveys were to:

- Inform development decisions for both the region and sub-regional areas
- Understand visitor satisfaction and identify areas for improvement
- Understand people's motivation for visiting
- Gather visitor profiles such as demographics, booking sources, internet use etc
- Gather economic expenditure data to feed into economic impact reports

In 2009, Northumberland Tourism and Strategic Partnership looked at eight market towns across the county, namely Wooler, Morpeth, Hexham, Amble, Alnwick, Berwick, Haltwhistle and Seahouses. This work was done in the belief that "Market towns are a vital element in the visitor economy across the North East" and "Tourism not only supports businesses, jobs and suppliers but is particularly significant in rural areas and market towns where there are fewer alternatives. In addition:

- Visitors help support local heritage, culture and community services
- Tourism is a reason to conserve special buildings, historic sites, beautiful landscapes and important wildlife sites
- Tourism is a vital element in regenerating an area.

Visitors can also create a critical mass of trade for the local economy, by bringing in new people and repeat visitors who spend on local goods and services. This can bring about growth, especially in the retail and hospitality sectors, and can contribute to an increase in quality as more discerning consumers are brought into the town".

Market towns are integral to this as "it will be important to make the most of their natural and cultural heritage and distinctiveness to...develop an excellent visitor welcome. Hexham has a key role to play in this respect:

- as a local service centre to the West of Newcastle

- as a gateway to Northumberland National Park and North Pennines AONB
- as a base to explore Hadrian's Wall, and
- through its own tourist attractions such as Hexham Abbey and the Gaol." (Miller report, July 2009)

A detailed breakdown of the Miller report recommendations and an assessment of progress is provided later in this report.

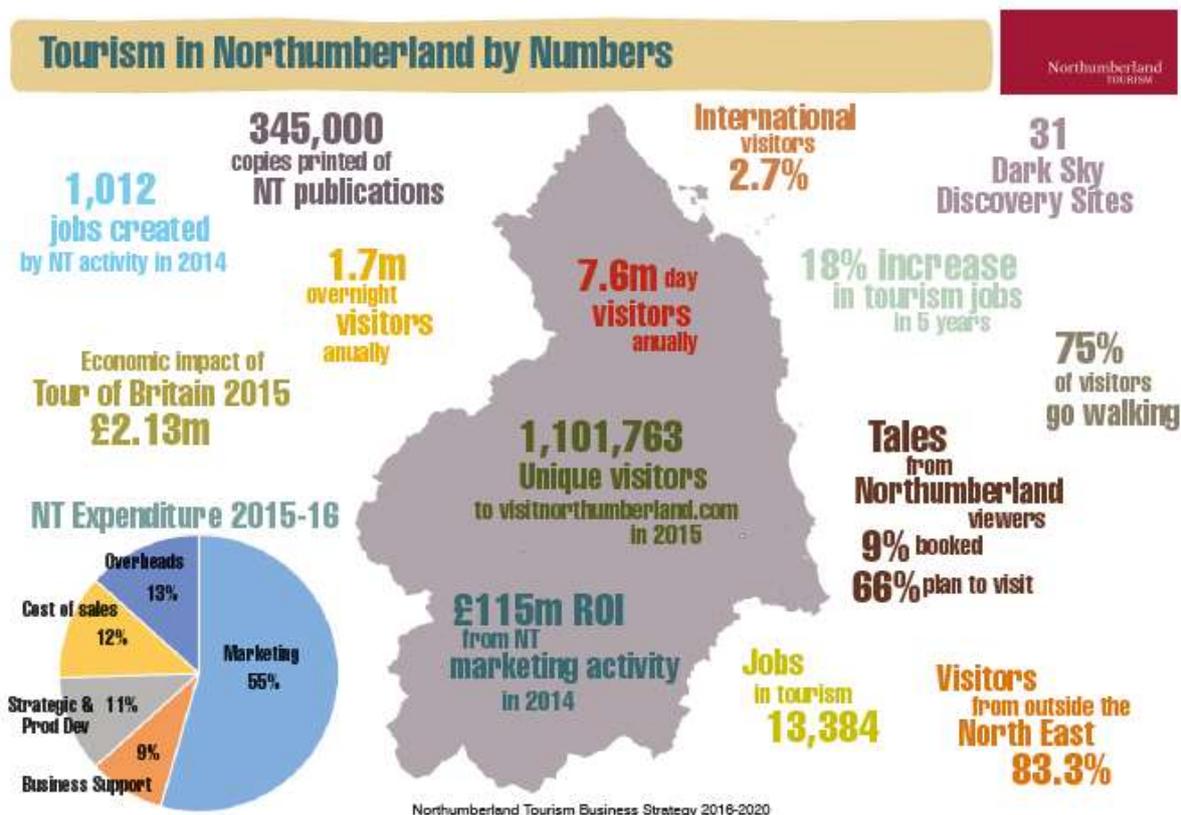
SECTOR PROFILE

Tourism in Northumberland makes up 11.8% of the county's economy, 2.7% higher than the national average, with an estimated economic impact of £816 million per annum, up from £730m in 2013.

In 2015, there were 7.8 million day visits and 1.7 million overnight visits (up 2.8% on the previous year - STEAM 2015).

9.5m people visited Northumberland in 2015, an increase of 3% on 2014, while visitor spend increased 5.5% during the year.

Tourism is the second biggest employment sector in Northumberland, representing approx 13% of total employment, or between 13,200 – 13, 900 jobs in 2015, up 4% on 2014. The county is also ranked second to Cornwall in Visit England's "most loved "destinations index, while individual attractions are now regularly winning national awards, such as Kielder Water & Forest Park winning Gold in 2013 as England's Best Visitor Experience. See figure below:



It should however be noted that there are some discrepancies in NT's figures – such as the number of jobs, explained as different methods being used to estimate the numbers of direct and indirect jobs in tourism overall.

CONTEXT

Following the demise of ONE North East, responsibility for marketing the county and promoting tourism has been the responsibility of Northumberland Tourism (NT), who have produced a destination management plan for 2015-2020. This plan aims to “set out the aims and strategic priorities for the development and promotion of tourism in the county to address identified issues and build on our strengths. Sitting within the context of the Northumberland County Council Economic Plan, countywide policies and strategies and a range of partnership management plans, the Northumberland Destination Management Plan (NDMP) provides the framework for actions to be undertaken by a wide range of agencies and organisations.” This plan is recognised by - and feeds into - Visit England, Visit Britain and central Government.

In this context, the definition of destination management is “the process of leading, influencing and coordinating the management of all the aspects of a destination that contribute to a visitor's experience, taking into account the needs of visitors, local residents, businesses and the environment.”

The plan identifies the following priorities for the county as a whole:

- Heritage (including Christian heritage)
- Northumbrian culture
- Cycling and walking
- Landscapes and unique/rare wildlife; nature-based tourism
- Events - a few authentic and inspirational signature events, plus a wide range of smaller ones
- Activities
- Dark Skies
- Weddings
- Out of season offer
- Food and Drink

If Hexham is considered as the gateway and base for visiting Northumberland National Park, Hadrian's Wall, North Pennines AONB and Kielder, then all of these priorities apply and should be taken into account.

VISITOR SURVEYS

In 2007 ONE North East commissioned Arkenford to profile and segment both visitors and locals on days out in the region, using three different segmentation models to produce a

very comprehensive and detailed analysis. It was however felt that this regional research may not necessarily reflect local trends in Hexham, so in 2009/10 the Market Towns work set out to define who was visiting the town at that time. In fact, as stated in the Miller report, the visitor profile for Hexham was very much the same as the county.

Northumberland Tourism are of the opinion that this is still the case and there is no evidence available to suggest otherwise. The Market Town Visitor surveys carried out in 2009 were based on over 500 face-to-face interviews in Hexham to understand current visitors, why they came and how they rated aspects of the town. This found that:

- 62% were from other parts of the region and 96% were from the UK
- 46% were staying over, 30% of these with friends and 61% outside town
- 75% came by car and 85% had found it very easy/easy to park.

Over 50% of visitors went to the Abbey and 33% to the Sele/other parks; and while most facilities were rated good (96% thought Hexham was a good or very good place to visit) the market and the toilets were seen as poor. 78% of visitors were adults, alone, in a couple or small groups. When asked what improvements they would like in the retail offer, fewer charity shops (47%), more variety of shops (28%) and more local produce (24%) were all cited. Cafes, pubs and restaurants scored highly, with between 77-87% rated as good or very good. As there are no more recent statistics, it would be interesting to see how figures compare today; for example, the high ratings for ease of parking are likely to have deteriorated.

VISITOR SEGMENTATION

ONE North East and NT define current and target audiences with the widely-used Ark Leisure model, which groups visitors based on their values and broad behaviour patterns. The most recent update by Ark in 2016 shows that the county currently attracts the following groups:

- Functionals: Thrifty, looking for value for money; interested in new experiences but not early adopters; enjoy self-catering, heritage, nostalgia, rural holidays. Most aged 35+
- Traditionals: Mainstream with traditional tastes; enjoy attractions, scenery, heritage, arts and culture. Will pay for good service and individual attention; enjoy good food. Aged 35+
- Discoverers: Independent, like exploring new things, places, history and culture as well as relaxation, educational or fun things to do. Expect value for money but will pay more for luxury breaks

In 2016 Ark estimated that these segments made up around 46% of the county's visitors, however this was based purely on responses to a visitnorthumberland.com survey, so should be treated with caution. These segments will however continue to be the focus of marketing by NT, who are also seeking to attract more Cosmopolitans. Cosmopolitans are

defined as confident high spenders, who like to try new things, physical and intellectual challenges, appreciate arts and culture and will pay for quality.

This segment may be harder to attract to Hexham, although the revamp of the Beaumont Hotel and Hexham House, if paired with a high-quality food and entertainment or events offering, could well attract more Cosmopolitans. The above three segments however are likely to remain the core market for Hexham, and as such should be the main focus of any marketing effort.

HEXHAM: DESTINATION PLANNING

Following on from the Market Town Welcome work carried out across eight towns in Northumberland, the Miller report set out a more detailed destination plan for Hexham from 2009 – 2019. The rationale for this work was based on the assumption that “Market towns are an attractive proposition not only for day trips, but also for short breaks and week-long stays, as they can integrate elements such as discovery of local heritage, authentic food and drink, speciality retail, festivals and events or activities in the nearby countryside.”

In this context, the plan was drafted as an “action plan for the whole partnership of organisations that are involved in delivering the visitor experience within the town and its hinterland” and its purpose was to:

- Help develop the tourism potential of Hexham and surrounding area and strengthen its identity for visitors
- Encourage cross fertilisation of ideas and identify the top priorities for action
- Provide a framework and rationale for investment and development planning in the visitor economy within the town, including harnessing private sector potential
- Help to clarify how partners and agencies can work together to map out a way forward for the next few years
- Support the sustainability of Hexham as a market town and visitor destination

This identified visitors to Hexham as day visitors from the surrounding area, as well as others on short breaks and longer holidays, and that there was therefore “particular potential to try to extend visitors’ length of stay and encourage more repeat visitors, plus to develop more short breaks and activity based holidays in and around the town.”

The methodology used is attached as Appendix Two. Following stakeholder consultation and input, the following vision was agreed:

“By 2020, Hexham will be a recognised base for exploring Northumberland’s many attractions, offering a friendly welcome, excellent local food and an engaging programme of artistic and cultural events across the year. Visitors will be attracted by the unique mix of past heritage and sustainable future...in terms of low carbon and green appearance....The

Abbey and its beautiful new visitor centre will be the must-see attraction to learn about the town's inspiring Christian heritage. The Market Place and Shambles form the lively hub of the town with stalls and street entertainment, and are the starting point for a series of innovatively signed walking trails..... Visitors can soak up more culture at Queens Hall or the Forum, or simply dine in one of the many quality restaurants or real ale pubs.

Visitors arriving for the horse races, or events such as conferences and weddings, will want to stay longer to experience more of what Hexham has to offer. “

This vision still applies today, and while progress has been made, some elements - such as improvements to the marketplace and Shambles - have been subject to debate and discussion but are yet to take place. The Miller team used this vision to agree the following objectives with the stakeholder group up to 2020:

- To strengthen Hexham's identity and profile as an attractive visitor destination
- To broaden Hexham's visitor segments and attract higher spending visitors
- To establish Hexham as a year-round destination, encouraging short breaks throughout the year
- To better promote the attractions and activities available in and around Hexham
- To increase visitor satisfaction levels which will in turn encourage repeat visits and increase the level of personal recommendations
- To encourage more visitors to walk, cycle and use public transport
- To develop a sustainable visitor economy offering excellent service, customer care and value for money
- To widen the range and improve the quality of retail and food and drink offers in the town
- To encourage new business investment
- To encourage and support collaboration between local organisations and businesses to enable joint delivery of the actions

Again these objectives still apply today, and as such could be adopted to take this work forward. The report goes on to define Hexham's strengths as follows:

“Hexham occupies an excellent location convenient for Northumberland National Park, the North Pennines AONB and Newcastle, and as such is the ideal location for visitors to base themselves for exploring the area. In the area visitors can cycle, walk, visit the horse races, indulge in many cultural and heritage events and activities or visit world renowned destinations such as Hadrian's Wall. There is an opportunity therefore for Hexham to capitalise on its assets and firmly establish itself as a base from which to explore the surrounding area.

In addition, Hexham itself offers a multitude of historical and cultural attractions such as the Abbey, Old Gaol, Shambles and Moot Hall, supported by a number of festivals and events around the town which collectively make up a strong visitor offer.”

This assessment clearly still stands, strengthened by new elements such as the Abbey Visitor Centre and the award of International Dark Skies status nearby. The team also carried out a

SWOT analysis of Hexham via workshops, stakeholder interviews and with the enabling group, with the following results:

Strengths

Proximity to Hadrian's Wall
Walking

Mediaeval atmosphere
Heritage and Nature
Hexham as a base to explore other places
Old Gaol
Forum Cinema
Proximity to MetroCentre
Leisure centre
Hexham Abbey
Activities – golf, riding, walking, cycling
Parks, environment
High level of customer service
Events and Festivals
National Park and AONB
Farmers' market
Local produce
Art & galleries
Independent shops

Weaknesses

No tea rooms open after 5pm
Lack of accommodation for families & mass tourism
Not many real ale pubs
Poor links Wentworth car park/centre
Lack of activities for families
Poor linkage Tyne Green/ Town Centre
Lack of foodie pubs
Lack of shopping & indoor facilities
No safe cycling/walking routes
Closed on Sundays
Limited evening activities
Main road congestion
Poor signage in key areas of the town

The conclusion was that the greatest opportunity lay in developing Hexham as a base for visitors to explore the surrounding area, with better walking and cycling routes, more conferences and weddings, creating a Sunday tourism offer, art tours/ courses, better quality food in pubs and making more of a feature of local produce.

In 2015, the town marketing group also carried out a SWOT analysis taken from the different perspectives of tourists, residents and business, with the following results:

Hexham Town Marketing Group

Marketing and Promotion SWOT 29th July 2015

<p>Strengths</p> <p>Residents and regular visitors Leisure opportunities – sports, arts and culture – eg bowling, golf, cycling, Queens Hall, cinema Range of shops and services – including hospitals, council services, schools Passion and Inspiration Walk and interesting areas in and around the town</p> <p>Businesses and inward investors Affluent customers Support on start up from other small businesses Partnership working and networking Enterprise hubs</p> <p>Tourists Abbey and Visitor Centre Proximity to Hadrian’s Wall Transport links</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p> <p>Residents and regular visitors Parking – deterrent to regular visitors Geography – upper and lower towns</p> <p>Businesses and inward investors Number of vacant premises Parking - lack of available parking for staff arriving throughout the day</p> <p>Tourists Geography – poor connections to surroundings for walking and cycling; boundaries formed by hills to south, A69 to north and west; poor links to Corbridge to the east Lack of budget hotel accommodation Layout of town does not make it easy to navigate Parking - lack of space in Wentworth during the day; lack of signage to non-council car parking and complexity of arrangements in the Wentworth</p> <p>All Poor state of public realm Poor signage and information High cost of property and services Parking</p>
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Residents and regular visitors Improve perception of the town, particularly in relation to the early evening and weekend economy Work with the Hexham Courant on advance promotion of events etc, rather than predominantly retrospective reviews and photos Better use of business email databases</p>	<p>Threats</p> <p>Residents and regular visitors Poor perception of town by its residents, lack of awareness of the range of amenities and opportunities</p> <p>Businesses and inward investors High rents in town centre premises leading to business closures will be compounded by redevelopment of Bus Station and potential introductory offers on new units</p>

<p>Businesses and inward investors *Vacant Tourist Information Centre?? Improved contact between businesses and Tourist Info Centre if it is relocated to town centre Bus Station redevelopment – new units</p> <p>Tourists *Strengthening visit Hexham identity – website and leaflet Increased use of Hexham branding on all marketing materials i.e. Town Traders map, and tied in with use of Northumberland Independent Spirit Market Hexham Old Town as an entity *Participation in Northumberland Tourism advertising and marketing campaigns *Provision of “signage” information in electronic form for hand held devices *Town ambassadors *Customer service/ambassador training for all businesses *New service station on Rotary Way and new Bus Station - opportunity to have information screens etc Links with coach companies and coach drivers Links with Corbridge</p> <p>All BID – funding and vehicle for working together Better use of social media *Increased joint working *Improved links – possible shuttle bus Neighbourhood Plan *Improved parking management and provision Bus Station redevelopment – forming better links between areas of the town, new retailers and less need for travel outside Hexham to shop</p>	<p>Loss of outlets for local crafts people when TIC moves to smaller premises</p> <p>Tourists Potential move of TIC to town centre less accessible to arriving visitors and loss of access to locally made crafts etc</p> <p>Competition from other towns in the region</p> <p>All Parking</p>
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Recurring weaknesses across these two exercises are:

- Lack of cycling and walking routes in and around the outskirts of town
- Poor signage
- Poor connectivity between Tyne Green and Wentworth car park to the town centre

Parking has become a weakness, while as predicted it can be assumed the loss of the Tourist Information Centre and retail outlet in Wentworth car park, gateway to the town for many visitors, has also had a negative impact. Other remaining weaknesses since 2009 are:

- Sunday closing
- Lack of family activities
- Lack of evening activities

The food and real ale offering has however improved and expanded in depth and scope in both pubs and restaurants, so can no longer be regarded as a weakness, while both the Queens Hall and Forum have gone from strength to strength in terms of choice and variety of performances on offer, and live music in pubs and other venues is a regular occurrence. For a town the size of Hexham the range of evening activities is therefore fairly strong. Sunday closing is largely down to the number of micro-businesses operating in the town, and while opening on Sundays has been trialled on a one-off basis for events, many small traders remain reluctant to go down this route. As regards lack of family activities, visiting families are not Hexham's core market or target audience, while residents participate in the many local groups and leisure facilities. Both of these perceived weaknesses should therefore be considered in the context of deciding priorities for Hexham and acting accordingly, i.e. defining target markets, creating appropriate marketing for these audiences and ensuring that facilities and services are of high quality.

MILLER DESTINATION PLAN FOR HEXHAM – DETAILED ANALYSIS

The Miller report listed actions under four priority headings for Hexham to achieve the vision of being a destination in its own right, as well as a base from which to explore the surrounding area. A detailed breakdown of the actions per priority and what has happened since the report was written is given below.

Priority One: Marketing and communicating the offer to potential visitors and really selling the town as a destination, by bringing together those involved and co-ordinating efforts to achieve this goal.

The recommendation was to set up an enabling group, led by HCP, to take this agenda forward. This group was established in 2009 and over time has evolved into the town marketing group, which developed the website and Visit Hexham brand as they are now. The visitor network group was also created to give businesses in the town the opportunity to meet and network, hear about any new developments or major events and any other

matters of interest, and continues to meet twice a year, at the start and end of the main tourist season (March and November).

Action: Produce a single town flyer/guide, and consider interactive information points around the town.

The new Visit Hexham flyer including adverts from businesses and a street map is now being distributed to key tourist points. Created with support from the BID, the print run was increased to 70,000 and circulation will be monitored closely this year to assess whether the flyer should be re-produced next year or not.

Pending: Create interactive information points. Given the closure of the Tourist Information Centre and advances in technology since 2009, interactive information points and /or creating an app for Hexham are well worth considering as the indications are they would be well used and would help to drive visitors to venues, attractions, shops or events. Risks include costs and vandalism. Existing story boards and signage require maintenance and improvement; already being progressed by the BID.

Action: Devise a targeted marketing campaign

Marketing the town and what it has to offer remains a key objective. While Hexham does now have a single brand which is used, more could be done to strengthen this and promote Hexham as gateway to NNPA, AONB and the Wall. This is in addition to capitalising on events such as Hadrian's Cavalry (April-September 2017), initiatives such as Dark Skies, or the current Robson Green effect, following his highly successful Tales from Northumberland series.

Action: Create unified suite of materials/ brand guidelines for use by all

The flyer and Visit Hexham logo are in place. Whether more needs to be done to increase the use of the logo or whether this is now a dated approach would have to be considered further by the marketing group.

Action: Develop the website

Re-developing the current Visit Hexham website to make it more dynamic, fresh, with full compatibility for all devices, embedded social media channels and added details such as full events listings has been agreed by the BID and work will begin this Spring.

Priority Two: Developing the events programme, arts and culture activities, promoting heritage and nature, aiming to enhance and develop the current offer to meet the growing needs of target visitors

While the events programme continues to evolve, and does now encompass the shoulder months (eg March/April Spring Festival, Book fair; October Spook Night), more could be done. Arts and culture are a real strength in Hexham which could also be further explored, as promotion should attract more of the desired target audiences.

Encouragingly, plans for this year include the Abbey running a flower show and an event to celebrate Hadrian's cavalry with Wild Dog Outdoors. Collaboration and creativity are key here, such as the Forum and Abbey working together to show Nosferatu in the Abbey as

part of the Wide Skies Festival, or artists and retailers working together to create themed displays for the Christmas market.

Action: Develop Christian Heritage trails

This would need to be undertaken by organisations such as churches and the Abbey and as such is not considered further here.

Action: Develop town heritage trails

A booklet– Discover Hexham’s Hidden History - was produced with details of three circular walks, along with story boards at strategic points around the town (eg Wentworth, Benson’s Monument). This could be reinvigorated; for example, the walks could feature on the Hexham app.

Action: Develop Hexham as an Arts Town

The suggestion was to build this into Hexham’s brand, as arts and culture are strong in the town so could and should feature more heavily in marketing. Interested parties have approached HCP to develop this further, such as creating an arts trail, tour or festival. This presents an opportunity worth exploring further.

Action: Run historical re-enactments

No action taken. Relevant groups would have to run this themselves, and none have come forward. Could be promoted on the new website to gauge interest.

Priority Three Enhancing town welcome

Some of the actions above also apply here - eg improving signage and creating information points. Given the recent scaling back of TIC operations and success of welcome hosts at major event such as the Rugby World Cup in Newcastle and Tall Ships in Blyth, HCP has been in discussions with Active Northumberland and the BID team regarding training up teams of town ambassadors or hosts. These people would be on hand around the town to welcome visitors, provide information and flag up key sites or activities. This would build on the “Know your Northumberland” scheme by tailoring it to Hexham, expanding on the work of the Abbey hosts. Details of how the scheme would work, remit of the hosts and how to make best use of those who are trained up remain to be worked out – eg could be staff in key locations and retailers, not just volunteers – however this is a tried and tested method of improving the visitor welcome which should be investigated further.

Action: Encourage investment in /creation of B&Bs

The suggestion was that HTC or NCC could offer grants. As things stand currently this is highly unlikely, and it is difficult to see how the BID or local players could influence what is essentially a business decision. The recommendation is therefore that no action to be taken.

Action: Extend opening hours/ Sunday opening

This has been considered above and trialled at specific events. HCP experience is that many small traders don’t wish to open later or on Sundays, however this could be discussed by the

BID team to see if there is an appetite to pursue this at this point.

Action: Tree planting/general environmental improvements/ tidying

Action for NCC to consider enhancing sites around the Sele, industrial estates and Priestpople, as well as how to improve general dereliction of certain sites, overgrown vegetation and litter. Various efforts have been made over the last few years to tackle litter and to encourage owners of buildings to keep these in a tidy and well repaired state, however this is an ongoing problem in common with most towns and cities. The BID is also considering how to tackle this via another strand of work, and while any efforts to improve the appearance of the town are welcome, this is not integral to marketing Hexham.

Action: Develop links with Egger to help mitigate negative perceptions of its appearance, for example by erecting signs explaining nature of the business and use of Kielder timber. Unlikely to have much impact; low priority.

Priority Four Improve existing facilities and infrastructure and support new developments such as the proposed Hexham Abbey Visitor Centre (now open).

Action: Signage audit and improvement Visibility, placement, content and coverage of signs were all queried; NCC has carried out an audit and the BID is actively pursuing this.

Action: Support plans to pedestrianise the Market Place to enable people to circulate more easily between the Abbey, Market Place and Shambles. This has proved to be a contentious issue; work is ongoing to propose improvements following the latest round of consultation.

Action: Improve e-skills for businesses by identifying suitable training. Not clear whether any action was taken on this; courses widely available via eg NBSL.

Action: Improve links between Wentworth car park and town centre Upgrading the path and how to make it more accessible have long been considered without finding a workable and affordable solution. Difficult to make a case for this to be high priority in current funding climate. As for upgrading Wentworth café and using its gateway location as a showcase outlet for local produce, it has to be assumed there is no incentive for the business owners to pursue this idea.

Action: Develop cycling offer by creating well signposted routes around town & environs, links to other cycleways, cycle -friendly accommodation. Links to signage initiative. The case for developing this is arguably even stronger now, as cyclists tend to be affluent and looking for good quality accommodation, food and drink, and entertainment. In addition high profile cycling events such as Tour of Britain are now proven models of attracting considerable tourism revenue. Should be discussed further as this presents an opportunity for Hexham, especially given the advent of new upscale accommodation in the Beaumont Hotel and Hexham House.

Action: Develop horse racing mini-breaks Given high internet usage of the target audience, this is perhaps not as big an opportunity as was, as many are happy to create their own break. However themed breaks including racing are worth further consideration - eg around a concert at the Abbey, events, weddings, or performances at the Forum or Queens Hall.

Given where Hexham is, there is also an opportunity to create holidays or short breaks around a range of activities such as walking – along the Wall or elsewhere; golf, fishing and riding, and as such this idea is worth further discussion.

Action: Establish a forum for hospitality businesses around Hexham to meet and discuss building the visitor offer. This is the visitor network group which meets twice a year in March and November.

CONCLUSIONS

The work carried out by ONE North East and various other bodies from 2003 -2010 was robust, thorough and well researched, and as such can be regarded as a solid basis to build on. The above analysis shows that some aspects recommended for action to improve Hexham’s welcome, facilities and offer to visitors have progressed, however more can be done. The advent of Dark Skies, Sill Discovery Centre, new accommodation coming onstream, a variety of new restaurants open, pubs that have upped their offer, venues offering new events and performances all combine to creating a “buzz” that marks a successful and thriving town. Hexham’s obvious strengths – attractive town, heritage especially the Abbey, good location as a base for visiting the area, as well as being a destination its own right – are very much still the case too. What has shifted fundamentally is that the various sources of public funding that were around for this type of work are no longer available; indeed many of the organisations whose role was to promote the region or parts of it have ceased to exist.

There is an opportunity for Hexham to build on its strengths, using the previous work as a framework, to market and promote itself as a thriving, bustling town with a vibrant business community, arts and culture, food, drink and events that make it an attractive place to live, visit and do business, and the BID is well placed to have a positive impact and play a key role to achieve this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Take on the Miller report’s first priority, **i.e. Market what Hexham has to offer to potential visitors and really sell the town as a destination, by bringing together those involved and co-ordinating efforts to achieve this goal.**

The town marketing group led by HCP, with the addition of some new members, could be tasked with taking this forward to reinvigorate and drive marketing the town. It should consider how to scale up and improve overall marketing, and which of the actions outlined

in this report to take forward. This would involve close partnership working between key players, to achieve maximum value for money and make the best of skills and resources available.

For example, short-term actions could include:

- Create a promotion strategy for Hexham as gateway to the Wall, and ideal base to take part in this year's Hadrian's cavalry events
- Ensure close links with NNPA to so Hexham makes the most of proximity to the Sill;
- Link with Kielder for Dark Skies and wildlife/nature based activities;
- Promote the new accommodation at the Beaumont and Hexham House.

It is also recommended that the following would have most impact and should be taken forward:

2 Create new Visit Hexham website: Even though this has been agreed, it is worth re-iterating that this forms the cornerstone that all other marketing activity is built around, and therefore ensuring this works well, looks and feel fit for purpose is key.

3 Build Visit Hexham brand: How best to build the brand should be considered by the marketing group with expert input. For example, should it be aligned more closely with Northumberland Tourism's "Northumberland an Independent Spirit" and "It's in our nature" in terms of look and feel; how best to work with NT; agree tactics and marketing materials, eg should VH flyer next year be replaced with panels on NT's Days out leaflet with circulation of 250,000.

4 Consider how to improve PR: Currently PR is limited or fragmented, and social media usage could be greatly increased, so how to resource this and achieve much greater exposure should be considered by the group. For example, how to work smarter with the Courant; identify key sites or publications such as Living North for features.

5 Enhance town welcome: As outlined in the body of the report, this should include improving signage and TIC facilities, which could be achieved in a variety of ways depending on practicality and costs. For example creating a Hexham app and/or interactive information points; training town hosts who would fulfil a tourist information function, etc.

6 Develop cycling offer: As stated above, there is potential for Hexham to become a base for activity holidays such as cycling, fishing and walking. Better and more marked routes for walking and cycling in and around the town, creating links with existing routes and facilities such as bike storage would all need to be considered.

7 Develop Hexham as an arts town: This may be simply promoting the arts on offer more effectively, or creating a festival, arts tour or trail.

Appendix One

Abbreviations

AONB – Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
HCP – Hexham Community Partnership
NDMP - Northumberland Destination Management Plan
NNPA – Northumberland National Park Authority
NT – Northumberland Tourism
TIC – Tourist Information Centre
VH – Visit Hexham

Resources used to inform this report

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Destination Planning for Hexham – Report to HCP & Northumberland Tourism, Miller, July 2009

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Hexham Vision 2020 & Town Plans 2014 onwards - Hexham Town Council

Northumberland Destination Management Plan 2015-2020 – Northumberland Tourism

Arkenford Leisure Segments & Visitor Profile (Northumberland) 2016

Northumberland Visitor Survey 2013

Northumberland STEAM Report 2009-15 – Global Tourism Solutions (UK) Ltd

Tourism by numbers in Northumberland 2016 – Northumberland Tourism Strategy 2016-2020

Economic Impact of Tourism in Northumberland – STEAM 2015 Headlines

Events attended

Northumberland Tourism Annual Conference 9 February 2017

Northumberland Tourism partner briefing - Beaumont Hotel, Hexham 22 February 2017

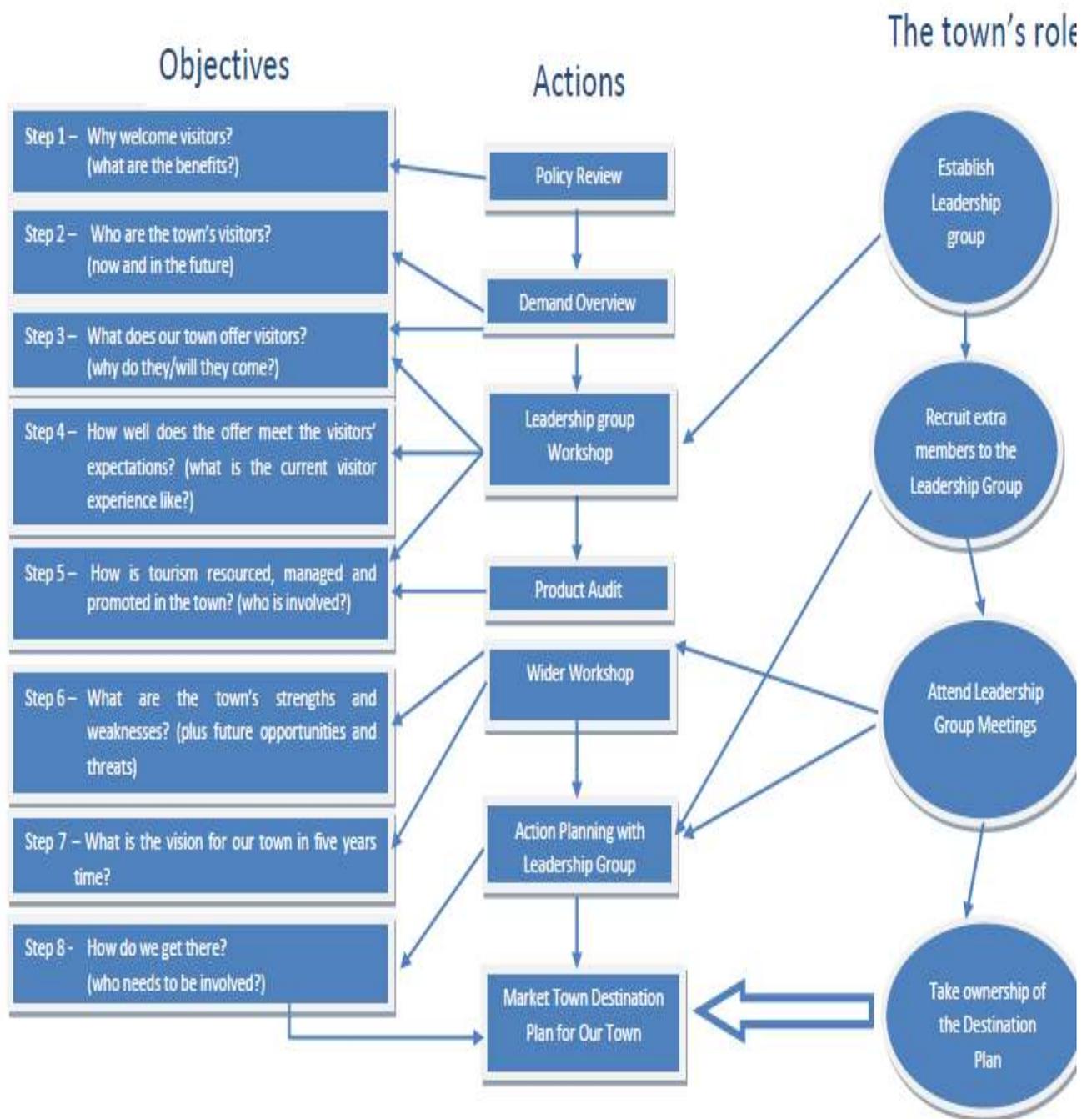
Hexham Visitor Network Group 9 March 2017

With thanks to:

Tamsin Beevor, Forum Cinema Manager & former Hexham Community Partnership Manager

Jude Garrow-Compson, HCP Tourism & Communications Officer

Appendix Two – Destination Planning Process used in the 2009 Miller report



Appendix Three:

Hexham Town Marketing Group membership as at March 2017

Cris Brown	Northumberland Tourism
Sarah Davidson	Active Northumberland
Owen Mills	Hexham Abbey
Lauren Dobson	Hexham Racecourse
Duncan Wise	NNPA
Simon Howarth	Queen's Hall
Janet Goodridge	Woodhorn Museums (Hexham Old Gaol and Moothall)
Jane Kevan	HTC Deputy Clerk
David Ratcliff	HCP Chair
Cllr Dave Clegg	HCP, town councillor & Chair, Neighbourhood Plan
Wendy Breach	HCP, Civic Society and local accommodation provider
Peter Rodger	HCP
Lucy Wilkinson	Forum Cinema
Janine Armstrong	Ashley Matthews & Chair, Hexham BID