VISITSCOTLAND CONSULTATION ON NATIONAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR SCOTLAND

Report by Chief Executive and Director of Environment & Infrastructure

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

28 February 2013

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 This report proposes a formal response to VisitScotland’s consultation on its draft National Tourism Development Plan for Scotland. The proposed response is set out in Appendix 1.

1.2 Tourism is a key sector in the local economy and realising its growth potential to 2020 is a key priority. The aim of the Tourism Development Plan for Scotland is to provide the spatial development strategy to help deliver future major tourism developments across Scotland. It is important the Council feeds into the finalised Plan because of the key role we have in relation to the Strategic Development Plan and Local Development Plan processes.

1.3 The main focus of the proposed Council response is to ensure that the tourism opportunities in Scottish Borders are properly highlighted. This includes the growth of tourism in the Tweed Valley and Berwickshire coast areas, the Borders Railway, and the ‘Gateways’ to Scotland on the A1, and A68/ A7 crossing points.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that the Committee:-

(a) approves the consultation response to the National Tourism Development Plan for Scotland set out in Appendix 1 of this report; and

(b) delegates authority to the Director of Environment & Infrastructure to include appropriate links to the National Tourism Development Plan for Scotland in the Local Development Plan.
3 NATIONAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONSULTATION

3.1 The visitor economy supports many jobs in all local authority areas across Scotland. It is a key sector of the Scottish Borders economy, supporting 5000 jobs and contributing £170 million to the local economy. Realising its growth potential up to 2020 is an important opportunity that we need to maximise.

3.2 In order to have a clear view of where the physical development opportunities for tourism are across Scotland, VisitScotland has developed a Draft National Tourism Development Plan for Scotland. The Draft Plan outlines a preliminary spatial framework across Scotland to support and deliver the sustainable growth of the visitor economy to 2020. VisitScotland are now consulting on the Draft Plan to get feedback from each area of Scotland and to make sure that key opportunities have been captured.

3.3 The aim of the Tourism Development Plan for Scotland is to provide the spatial development strategy to help deliver part of Tourism Scotland 2020. The Plan needs to identify and incorporate future initiatives for major development from all tourism sectors across Scotland. The Plan will help secure and prioritise future investment in the infrastructure and facilities necessary to support the on-going growth of the visitor economy.

3.4 The Plan’s remit is to focus on spatial development issues, and therefore it does not address other important operational matters in the tourism sector such as service, skills, training or quality. These issues will be matters for the Area Tourism Partnership to consider as part of its refresh of the Scottish Borders Tourism Strategy. VisitScotland requires consultation responses to the Draft Plan by 1 March 2013.

3.5 It is particularly important that Local Authorities feed into the finalised Plan because of the key role Councils have in relation to the Strategic Development Plan and Local Development Plan processes. It is expected that the National Tourism Development Plan for Scotland will influence emerging Local Development Plans across Scotland.

4 CONSULTATION RESPONSE

4.1 The proposed consultation response is set out in Appendix 1 to this report. The response has been informed by our regular discussions with local partner organisations including the Scottish Borders Tourism Partnership and the 7stanes Community Interest Company.

4.2 It is concerning that this new national plan has been developed with all the executive agencies of Scottish Government, but that there seems to have been no COSLA or Local Authority involvement in developing this document. In view of the focus on Spatial Planning, and Local Development Plans, it would have made sense to seek more input at an earlier stage from COSLA and Local Authority representatives. It is important that the comments that Scottish Borders Council are now making, and those of other Councils, are properly included in the final version of the Plan.
4.3 The main focus of the proposed Council response is to ensure that the tourism opportunities in Scottish Borders are properly highlighted in the final version of the Tourism Development Plan. Opportunities around the Borders Railway, Mountain Biking, Walking and Diving are mentioned in the Draft Plan. However, by making relatively minor changes to the final Plan, a much clearer sense of these opportunities can be set out.

4.4 The changes set out on pages 6 and 7 of Appendix 1 are particularly important. We want to make sure that VisitScotland, and prospective developers reading the national Tourism Development plan, understand the significance of the Borders Railway project and the tourism opportunities it will provide. We want to make sure that the opportunities for resort type developments, which are flagged in the Draft Plan, are properly captured. There is also an opportunity to develop conference related tourism around the investments made at the Scottish Borders Campus in Galashiels. This is a significant local opportunity.

4.5 The Plan should also highlight the importance of Tourism ‘Gateways’ to Scotland, including the development of the A1 entry point, but also the crossing points on the A68 and A7.

4.6 The final Plan needs to recognise more fully the national importance and growth potential of the mountain biking experience in the Scottish Borders (and South of Scotland). Although Glentress is mentioned, there is no recognition of the Innerleithen and Newcastleton 7stanes sites. In particular, the final Plan should acknowledge the Innerleithen Mountain Bike park opportunity, for which the AIMUp group was recently granted planning permission in principle.

4.7 The Council will need to ensure that these tourism opportunities are covered appropriately as part of the Local Development Plan that is currently being developed. This should be achievable given the timetable that the LDP preparation is following.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial
There are no costs attached to the recommendations contained in this report.

5.2 Risk and Mitigations
There is a risk that future tourism development opportunities in the Scottish Borders will not be promoted and developed if they are not included in this national Plan. Therefore, it is important that the Council responds to this consultation to ensure that the tourism development opportunities in the Scottish Borders are appropriately identified in the final version of the Tourism Development Plan for Scotland.

5.3 Equalities
An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out on this proposal and it is anticipated that there are no adverse equality implications.

5.4 Acting Sustainably
Tourism is a key part of our local economy, providing a range of business and job opportunities across the whole of the area. It is important that the National Tourism Development Plan properly recognises the tourism opportunities in the Scottish Borders in order that they can be supported.
and developed in future. ‘Sustainable tourism’ is also likely to be an opportunity for Borders businesses in the future.

5.5 Carbon Management

This consultation response has no direct implications for the Council’s carbon emissions. In future, additional visitor numbers, or new visitor attractions could have an affect on overall carbon emissions in the Scottish Borders.

5.6 Rural Proofing

Rural proofing is not required because this is not a new or amended Council policy or strategy.

6 CONSULTATION

6.1 The Chief Financial Officer, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, the Head of Audit and Risk, and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted and had no comments on the report.

Approved by

Chief Executive  Signature  ...........................................

Director of Environment & Infrastructure  Signature  ...........................................

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Background Papers: None

Previous Minute Reference: None

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