

To: Cabinet
Date: 15 December 2021
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Tourism Review Recommendations Update

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Scrutiny-commissioned Tourism Review Recommendations Update
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Liz Wade, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Mary Clarkson, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Tourism
Corporate Priority:	Support Thriving Communities, Enable and Inclusive Economy, Pursue Zero Carbon Oxford
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendation in the body of this report.	

Appendices
None

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 08 September 2021, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report to Cabinet concerning the Scrutiny-commissioned Tourism Review Recommendations Update. This report is delayed in being presented to Cabinet owing to an officer oversight.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Mary Clarkson, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Tourism for presenting the report and answering questions,

Iain Nicholson, City Centre Manager, for supporting the meeting and Matt Peachey, Economic Development Manager, for authoring the report.

Summary and recommendation

3. Councillor Andrew Gant addressed the Committee concerning this item at the start of the meeting in his capacity as the Chair of the Tourism Management Review Group. The review had been a good piece of work with which he was proud to have been involved. Covid-19 had, inevitably, had a profound impact on tourism, as recognised by the update report. This was a matter which warranted more active engagement and the update provided an opportunity to ask that Cabinet revisit the report and recommendations and he urged the Committee to make a recommendation to that effect.
4. Councillor Mary Clarkson, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Tourism, introduced the report. Inevitably much of the work in this area had come to a halt as result of Covid-19. The Council had continued to work with Experience Oxfordshire and provided £50,000 to help support the visitor economy until March 2023. It was unlikely that the Council would be in a position to provide further funding to Experience Oxfordshire which was, now, moving towards operating on a more commercial basis. The emerging Oxford Economic Strategy and City Centre Action Plan would include recovering and rebuilding the visitor economy as a priority. Visitor numbers had plummeted as a result of the pandemic and were currently estimated to be just 15% of the number in 2019 and were anticipated to reach 50% of the number in 2022. Work on identifying alternative arrangements for the delivery of visitors by coach was continuing with the County Council, with a site near the Westgate being considered as an additional drop off location to help ease pressure on St Giles. It would not, however, be meaningful to conduct a consultation (for which funding was available) on options given the atypically low number of coach arrivals at the present time. Officers were working to find a suitable premises for a visitor centre in the hope of finding someone willing to run it on a private and commercial basis. A fundamental challenge was to persuade visitors to spend more time and money in the city. The majority of visitors were estimated to spend no more than 90 minutes in the city. The recent opening of hotels in and close to the city should be help with that.
5. In response, issues that were considered in detail by the Committee included:
 - Parking arrangements for coaches
 - Recent developments in the idea of a cable car running from Redbridge Park and Ride to the City Centre
 - The expected timing of the City Centre Action Plan
 - The future of Experience Oxfordshire
 - Toilet provision in the City Centre
 - Activities relating to the Waterways
6. The Committee makes two recommendations relating to i) the environmental impact of tourist traffic to Oxford, and ii) the availability of public toilets in the City Centre.

Environmentally Sustainable Tourist Transport

7. A significant proportion of the discussion held by Scrutiny, evidencing a widespread concern, was over issues relating to making tourist transport to Oxford more environmentally sustainable. With the majority of visitors spending not more than 90 minutes in Oxford, the environmental cost of coming to Oxford has a short period in which to be amortised by other corresponding benefits. This makes it incredibly important, particularly in light of the high ratio of visitors to residents, that the environmental impact of tourist transport is managed as much as possible. The Committee were particularly interested in the new plans for coach parking away from St Giles, the future impacts of the Zero Emissions Zone on coach traffic, and issues of accessibility from the train station to the City Centre. The Committee was also given an update on the previously-mooted idea around a cable car, running from Redbridge Park and Ride to the City Centre, which had recently had a developer come forward with a proposal alongside the world's primary cable car manufacturer. Multiple other meetings with civic, business and environmental groups had also taken place.
8. The Committee recognises that there is a wide matrix of stakeholders responsible for the environmental sustainability of visitor transport to Oxford, with the County Council, bus and coach providers being key. The City Council does not fall within this group who hold primary responsibility, making it more difficult to make direct interventions. However, the Council is not without the ability to influence –its planning policies, the OxWED development, and its joint-working with those key partners on other environmentally-focused traffic initiatives are all opportunities for the Council to press for policies which will promote more environmentally sustainable visitor transport. The Committee asks that the Council give full thought as to how this influence can be maximised.

Recommendation 1: That the Council plans how it will work with those responsible for tourist travel to Oxford more environmentally sustainable

Public Toilets in the City Centre

9. The second issue raised by the Committee is one which Scrutiny has previously made recommendations concerning. A recommendation made by the Companies Scrutiny Panel meeting of 13 March 2020 requested that “the Council tasks the City Centre Manager to reinvigorate and republicise its previous scheme for allowing members of the public to use shop toilets in the City Centre and the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group requires ODS to coordinate with these efforts and capitalise on any benefits accordingly.”
10. This recommendation was made just days before the country went into its first Covid-19 lockdown, meaning the response by the executive was not provided until June 2020, supporting it. Clearly, however, the disruption of Covid has lasted far longer than almost all people anticipated, making it impractical to implement this recommendation. However, the paucity of public toilet provision in the City Centre remains. Although tourist numbers are currently low relative to pre-pandemic levels, this remains an urgent issue for a proportion of those visitors. It is the view of the Committee that with the country beginning to open up once again, but with tourists having not returned in the same numbers now is an

apposite time to start doing the groundwork for a scheme, in readiness for an increase in tourist numbers next summer.

11. The Committee does recognise that Covid does pose additional challenges to such a scheme. However, it also recognises that decreased footfall is problematic for City Centre businesses, and that similar schemes elsewhere have reported business arising from participating. In light of the need for access to toilets, the fact that toilet use (and therefore risk) would mainly be displaced rather than reduced if the scheme were not offered, and the positive impact on business for those participating, on balance the Committee supports the revival of the partnership with City Centre shops to provide a toilet scheme.

Recommendation 2: That the Council revives its partnership with City Centre shops to provide a toilet scheme.

Further Consideration

12. Whilst Scrutiny is unlikely to consider a further update report this civic year on the Tourism Review, it will be considering an update on the Waterways in November, an important element of which relates to their contribution to culture, heritage and tourism.

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Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 08/09/2021 concerning the Scrutiny-commissioned Tourism Review Recommendations Update

Response provided by Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Tourism, Mary Clarkson

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That the Council plans how it will work with those responsible for tourist travel to Oxford more environmentally sustainable		
2) That the Council revives its partnership with City Centre shops to provide a toilet scheme.		

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