

North Shropshire & Oswestry Destination Partnership Strategy and Action Plan Workshop 15 May 2012

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What's today's workshop all about?

To:

- Tell you what we have been doing so far.....
- Share with you our emerging thoughts, concepts & ideas about: North Shropshire & Oswestry tourism products & potential; strategy and action plan
- Test out some of these ideas and get your reactions
- Ask you to work hard on some of the ideas!
- Make sure you know what we'll be doing next
- Absorb your responses and do some more work...

We are taking a strategic route to success:

- Vision – where do we want to be in 2017?
- Strategy – see the whole game and how to win
- Tactics – playing clever in approach
- Actions – the toolbox, all the whistles and bells with your ownership

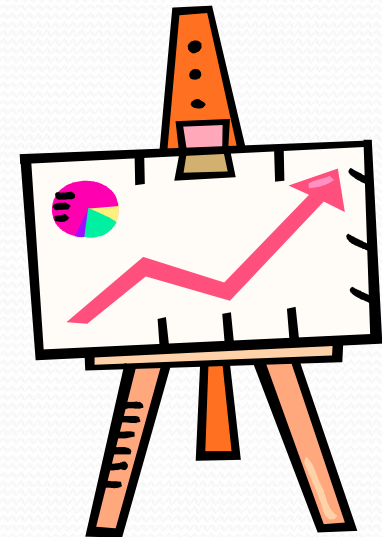
IT'S YOUR STRATEGY

Helping to give direction

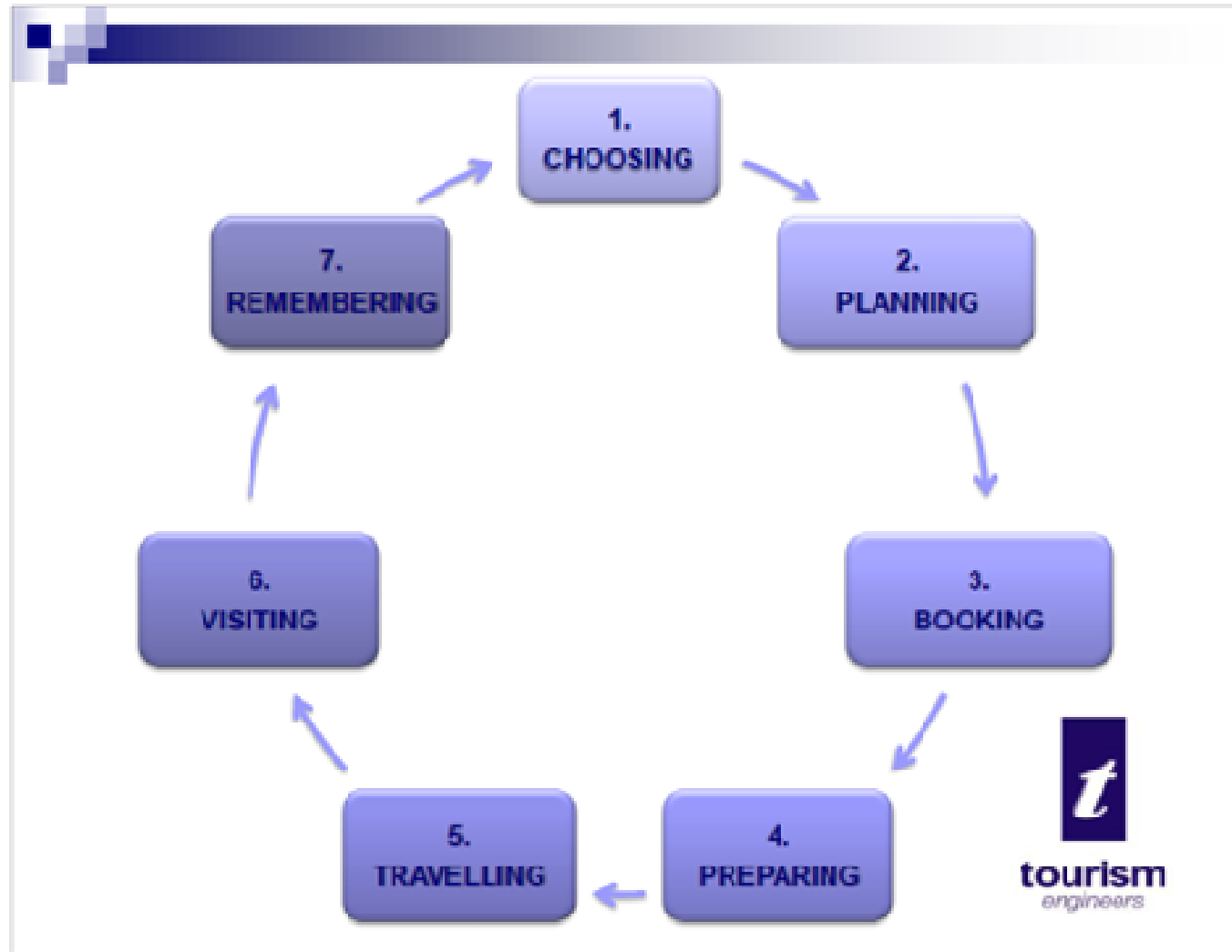


Developing a Strategy

- Setting Vision & Direction
- To date led by Big Themes – not what are we trying to achieve?
- Develop a Vision that all sign up to
- Work with priority markets
- Agree where are we aiming to go
- Anchored by economic growth
- Identify who is leading getting us there
- Are partners up for delivering changes?



Consider the 'Visitor Journey'



The VISION for 2017?

Developing the components

- Increased visitor volume and value of visitors as NSO area better known, with a clear, attractive identity and “offer”
- More retention of repeat visitors in NSO area, **increased overnights**
- Discovery of NSO by steady growth in **new** visitors for **business & leisure**
- Proud of its ‘top of the class’ accommodation, venues and niche specialisms
- Well known for its **independent market towns, connoisseur gardens/nurseries and living landscapes** **attracting staying visitors** to explore the countryside and surrounding World Heritage Sites
- Businesses **working together** and through productive partnerships across the borders
- But... retained its **essentially quiet and peaceful nature and strengthened its market towns**, the **backbone** of its product



We'll come back to the Vision.....

....For now, here are some
CHALLENGES

(Here's one: NSO is short for North Shropshire & Oswestry, but we need an identity for the area!)



The Challenges for NSO area

1. Perceptions & Profile
2. Performance
3. Product
4. Partnerships

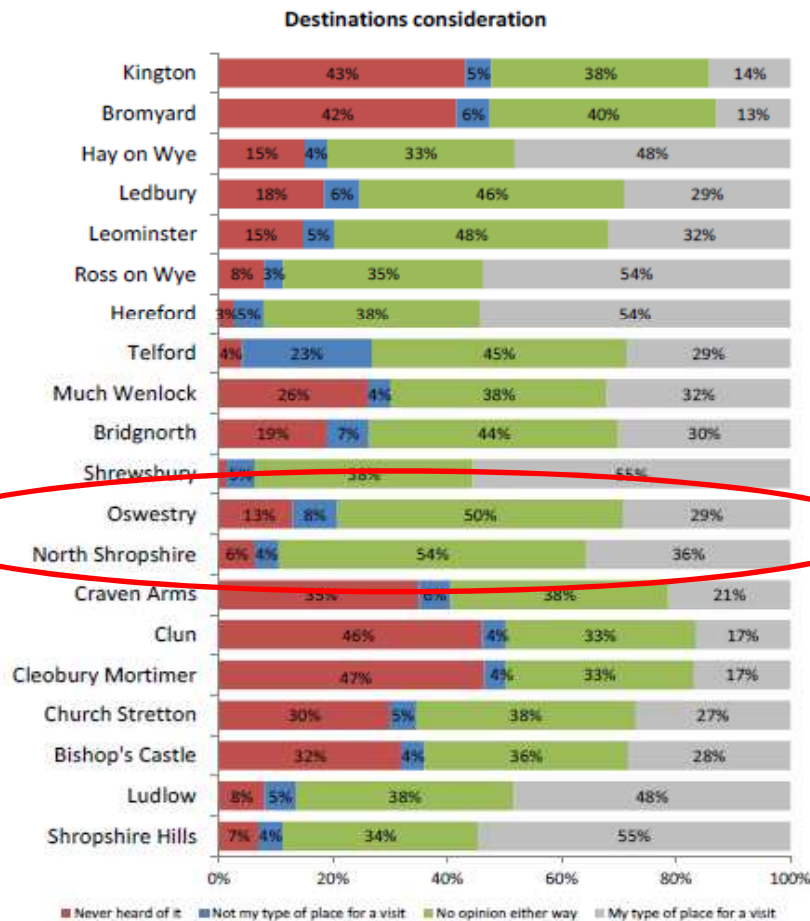


Challenge 1

PERCEPTIONS & PROFILE

Weak destination identity within Marches

Destinations consideration



- Top 3 "My type of place" for a visit:
 - Shrewsbury
 - Shropshire Hills
 - Hereford
- Smaller towns that have appeal include:
 - Ross on Wye
 - Hay on Wye
 - Ludlow

Our area has the highest 'no opinion' – this plan must aim to change this

Perceptions & Profile

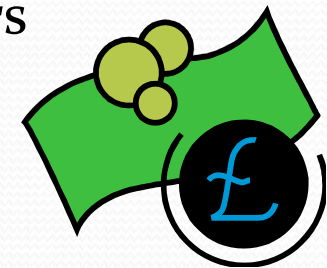
- You've already worked hard on strengths & weaknesses
- Research shows which types of visitor feel "*This is my kind of place*"
- Our role = look impartially, benchmark you vs. competition
- The NSO area overall is 'indistinct' – sandwiched between better known areas
- NE and NW Shropshire are very **different** in feel – links and outlooks to Wales, Cheshire and Staffordshire
- Perception of much of the product being 'smaller' – NSO over-shadowed by bigger neighbours
- Your own perceptions of the area are mixed
- Perhaps some things are **better** and others are **not as good** as you think?



Challenge 2 – PERFORMANCE

Economic under performance

- In 2005/6, 2.2 million visitors came to NSO area
 - 2m day visitors (91%) and 200,000 (9%) overnighters
- £115m spent by all visitors
 - £73m (63%) day visitors; £42m (37%) overnight



- NSO gets **1 in 5** trips and spend of tourists to Shropshire and Telford/Wrekin

- BUT 'under-performance' in the overnight segment – only **1 in 6** share of Shrops/Wrekin overnight trips
19% of overnight spend



- Tourism employment (2,850 jobs) is 18% of Shropshire & Wrekin – reduced visitor spend knock on effect on jobs

Yet – very strong visitor loyalty

2007 visitor surveys:

- 69% in Oswestry are repeat - increases to 84% repeat for North Shrops
- Day visitors up to 78% Oswestry and 92% North Shropshire
- 8 out of 10 DAY visitors come from Shropshire, Cheshire, North Wales and West Midlands conurbation
- FEW from Manchester/ Merseyside
- Tend to be older & probably visiting favourite repeat haunts

BUT spend relatively short time here: only 4 hours for day visitors - and around 2.5 nights



So we must respond

- As a *Visitor Economy Strategy* – the key priority is to increase visitor activity, length of stay and spend in the area
- A need to attract more NEW visitors
- And to extend stay/ experiences / spend for REPEATERS
- More visitors, especially staying overnight, spending more with local businesses – increasing employment and business sustainability in a virtuous circle



Challenge 3:

THE VISITOR PRODUCT

of North Shropshire & Oswestry

The Destination Sandwich

The wraparound
The welcome
Public environment
The food and drink
The service
The atmosphere
Visitor attractions
Heritage and culture
Value for money
Value for time



What do visitors to Shropshire like?

(Arkenford 2012)

- Visiting local towns / villages / countryside, scenic areas & landscapes is the **most appealing activity** when on holiday, to the target markets
- Outdoor activity and shopping appear is **low** on the list - a little surprising perhaps?
- Good news is that the strongest Shropshire association is with market towns/ villages/ scenic countryside and landscapes for 89% of responders
- Negative : Shropshire is least associated with shopping and cultural exhibitions, events and festivals.

So why visit 'here' not 'there'?

You may be both **too optimistic** about the product on the one hand - but also possibly **too critical** of it at the same time

Is the product or approach good enough? Canals, Food, Historic Properties?

Is some of the product/potential actually BETTER than you think?

- **luxury end self catering/B&B and country hotels** – could be brand leaders for the 'destination sell'?
- **Meres and Mosses** are of international importance –target markets liking countryside/AONBs
- Some **specialist retailers, skills and products** in NSO – are they sufficiently 'stand out' to pull customers here?

Market Towns: heritage, independent retail & distinctiveness



Options for 'niche' markets?

Including;

- WWII Airfields/ heritage/ genealogy
- Literary links / authors – eg Wilfred Owen and WW1 opportunity in 2014
- Angling/water based activity /canoeing etc
- Equestrian, riding, stables/racing
- Celebration, reunions & wedding locations
- Churches and church yards “God’s Little Acre”
- Heritage railways/collectibles
- Disability/accessible routes, attractions, activities



And Business/ Conference Tourism

Business, conferencing and specialist trade generated by:

- Lion Quays
- MacDonald Hill Valley
- Hawkstone Park
- Mercure Shrewsbury Albrighton
- Hawkstone Hall retreat / conference centre
- Oswestry Rugby Club / Venue Football
- Oswestry Showground
- Oswestry Orthopaedic Hospital
- Walford & North Shrops College
- The Müller effect – large business base
- Also parents visiting public schools & colleges

Accommodation review tells us- 9% of visitors but 37% of spend



Accommodation

- Spread of large hotels and caravan parks, but mainly small independent B&Bs
- Several of the AA ratings are high 75⁰%-87⁰%
- A good number of AA 2 rosette for dining at both hotels and inns
- A few larger resort/ spa hotels and a small number of country house hotels
- Self catering tends to be hidden behind agencies, tends to be 4 star, but...
- A good amount of quality 5 star/Gold self cater
- Crucial to get at least into Shropshire Tourism Accommodation Assessment Scheme local grading



Challenge 4: PARTNERSHIP

Challenge 4: Partnership

- Are your Partnerships working at their maximum level?
- Can they be improved and if so how?
- Can more be done together without losing their essential distinctiveness
- Are all the right businesses involved enough yet?
- Is the Destination Partnership able to lead and articulate its role sufficiently?
- Is there enough clarity on “who does what”?
- Can more be done with your “cross border” partners?
- What’s the best role for the tourism associations
- How best to ensure all the regeneration work dovetails with your own work

Let's consider your 'Big Themes' developed at 2011 conference



We'd like to share our response to your original 'Big Themes'

- Canals
- Walking & Cycling
- Landscapes
- Diverse Attractions & Gardens
- Heritage
- Food & Drink
- Events
- Golf & Sport/Activity

Our response to:

Canals

- Canals are in nearby counties - why come here?
- Needs making easy to “consume” them - boat trips, walks, bustling basins with pubs, cafes &/or retail
- Showcase other activity – canoeing, angling, cycling, painting, interest for children
- NSO canals don’t have many “must sees” - tunnels, lifts, lock flights etc
- BUT Pontcysyllte & Chirk aqueducts & views are **near and powerful**
- Marinas & town locations must come to life and **always be worth visiting.**

Walking

- Walking is everywhere, so need to show the special and ease of being here
- North Shropshire’s flat Plain opportunities to less mobile markets
- Develop/promote circular routes & short trails - more attractive to larger general walking markets
- *Meres & Mosses* will help in the medium-longer term
- Support *Walkers are Welcome* in Oswestry & Whitchurch & invest in business support
- Use imagery based around ‘upland’ Offa’s Dyke Path and the Borderlands

Our response to:

Landscapes

- What's special about here?
- Canals, lakes and meres, rivers, woodlands, heaths, hills, plains, geology, farming and the flora & fauna in it
- Archaeological remains in the landscape
- Direct visitors to the best viewpoints and experiences
- Few places can boast the opportunity to see 'the country's biggest spider' or the habitat of poisonous snakes in the Mosses next to a WW2 control tower!
- Don't simply promote the 'landscape' but what's special within it

Attractions

- "*Diverse attractions*" = kiss of death - cf "*Something for everyone*" - hotchpotch lacking clear identity
- NOT a 'big theme'
- But Gardens & Gardening could be a lead product
- Gardens/centres, *Britain in Bloom* winning towns, OGs
- National Garden Scheme, Wem's Sweet Pea Festival
- Link NT properties: Powis Castle, Chirk & Erdigg, Shrewsbury Flower Show/Quarry, Cheshire's gardens of distinction campaign
- William Emes: 18thC landscape gardener opps

Our response to

Heritage

- Everyone has heritage: clarify what kind: built, natural, military, literary...
- needs better articulation if remaining a “big theme”
- Pontcysyllte & Chirk aqueducts = industrial heritage, but **imaginatively presented & differentiated** for leisure markets
- **Market towns** are BIG part of the heritage offer
- Cambrian Heritage Railways / Llanymynech area need longer term growth
- ‘Corridor routes’ A483/A5 and the A53 –houses, castles, & Thomas Telford story

| Food & Drink

- Are we sure? Evidence? NOT a BIG theme? Who are local “food heroes” & what are the special products?
- North Shropshire isn’t Ludlow and it doesn’t need to be ‘high end’
- Most people enjoy traditional pubs & teashops and markets –build on
- Opportunities to buy and taste locally sourced produce
- Link up food, market towns & independent local shops / and farm shops
- Is it more an underlying supporting theme?

Our response to

Events

- Festivals/events attract new audiences to places they wouldn't normally think of visiting, but gives a different reason to visit
- Oswestry Showground's shows (Trucks, Antiques, Car Rallies, Agricultural) generate **biggest volume** of visitors within NSO area : c. 40,000+
- Specific events eg Ellesmere Triathlon, Hawkstone Park Moto-Cross & big neighbours eg Cholmondeley Pageant of Power create visits, stays & more spend by visitors often unaware of destination
- better calendar, linkages and promotion potential

Golf & Sport

- Well known golf hotel /courses in area – yet the intelligence is contradictory:
- New Arkenford research suggests golf less important to overall core segments – is niche, but high value
- But our consultations say it IS v important to whole area
- Specific hotels/golf courses lead using existing networks/ rather than tourism destination led approaches
- Golf visitor (and partner) must be woo'd by nearby towns and attractions to **make local** visits; partner activity can be high spend

So our take on your themes looks like this:

Your Original Themes

- Canals
- Walking & Cycling
- Landscapes
- Diverse Attractions & Gardens
- Heritage
- Food & Drink
- Events
- Golf & Sport/Activity



Suggested Priorities

- Living Landscapes
- Canals /Water
- Gardens & gardening
- Heritage (inc Market Towns)
- Walking/Cycling

Secondary Supporting

- Events/business visits
- Golf & Sport/Activity
- Food & Drink

Marketing/ Identity

These aren't serious straplines – but are posed to help us think:

- Shropshire's Blue, Green and Pleasant Land
- Shropshire's Hidden Heartlands
- Shropshire's Water Ways and Walking Lands
- The Lakes, Canals and Gardens of Shropshire
- Essential England - in Miniature
- Thomas Telford's Trek across England to Wales
- Centre for exploration – betwixt World Heritage Sites
- Shropshire's Northern Borderlands
- Weird, Watery and Wonderful North Shropshire
- Bold, beautiful, blooming and by the Borders
- The Blooming Borders of Shropshire

Truly a Land of Borders – Visitors flow in all directions





Your turn now – for a few minutes

- What do you think the Vision should look like?
- Do you have a vision for your own business or organisation?
- Does it fit in?
- We'd like you to tell us your feelings about the Vision components – think about where you see NSO in 5 years time – and tell us more....

..... **On we go....**

The emerging Vision revisited - your views?

- Increased visitor volume and value of visitors as NSO area better known, with a clear, attractive identity and “offer”
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Group activity session

- Grab a coffee
- Four groups
- Each group will cover all 4 topics
- Between you record your responses on the Topic Sheets
- Finish at around 12.40 then group discussion
- Please develop actions to address each of the challenges (as many as you want!)
- BUT you must decide on your group's top 3 priorities

The Challenges: how can we address them

- please spend 20-25 minutes on each one
- identify your **top three actions** for each
- identify who will deliver them

1. Perceptions & Profile
2. Performance
3. Product
4. Partnerships



Summary

- A flavour of your responses
- Does the Draft Vision work?
- Do the responses move the Vision forward?

What happens after today?

We will: immediately meet your Steering Group, then:

- Complete final consultations
- Agree conclusions and develop priorities
- Hold 2 final town Action Plan workshops June 13th
- Develop area-wide Five year Strategy
- Create Action Plan for whole area
- Write Action Plans for the 2 towns

All underpinned by models for effective collaborative working