



Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Joint Select Committee – Communities & Localism and Growth, Infrastructure & Housing held on Wednesday 13 July 2022 in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 12.29 pm.

Members present

M Harker OBE (Chairman), D Carroll (Chairman), P Drayton, S Barrett, M Hussain JP, M Knight, F Mahon, C Oliver, M Stannard, L Smith BEM, S James, S Chapple, Q Chaudhry, I Darby, N Marshall, C Poll, D Town, A Waite and S Wilson

Others in attendance

K Sutherland, P Batting, T Fowler, L Michelson, S Payne, M Tett and L Dowson

Agenda Item

1 **Apologies for Absence/Changes in Membership**

Apologies for Absence had been received from Councillor Carl Etholen.

Councillor Sarah James was in attendance substituting for Councillor Tom Hunter Watts.

2 **Appointment of Vice-Chairman for Communities and Localism Select Committee**

The Chairman of the Communities and Localism Select Committee confirmed their appointment of Councillor Ashley Waite as Vice-chairman of the Communities and Localism Select Committee.

RESOLVED: that Councillor Ashley Waite be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Communities and Localism Select Committee for the ensuing year.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

4 **Minutes of the Previous Communities and Localism Select Committee Meetings**

The minutes of the Communities & Localism Select Committee meetings held on 26th April 2022 and 18th May 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

5 Public Questions

No public questions had been received.

6 Visitor Economy in Buckinghamshire

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Martin Tett, Leader of the Council, Philippa Batting, Managing Director for Buckinghamshire Business First, Lucy Dowson, Tourism Development Manager for Visit Buckinghamshire, Bill Morris, Co-Chair for Buckinghamshire Culture, Lisa Michelson, Service Director, Economic Growth and Regeneration, Sophie Payne, Service Director, Culture, Sport & Leisure and Shabnam Ali, Head of Economic Growth, to the meeting.

The following points were highlighted during the presentations:

- Buckinghamshire had a wide variety of attractions for Visitors, placed in an ideal location with 20 million people living 90 minutes from Aylesbury. These included well known Historical and National Trust properties, as well as film and television locations and beautiful natural environments. In 2019, the Visitor Economy in Bucks was worth £900million.
- Covid had affected the Tourism industry heavily, Buckinghamshire Council had been relatively quick to provide support to affected businesses compared to other Local Authorities. The perception of the sector had shifted with the stability of working in the tourism sector along with long working hours now perceived more negatively.
- Staff retention was challenging for those employed in the Visitor Economy. Some village based businesses were closing on alternating days of the week due to shortages in staff. High cost of living in Buckinghamshire was a contributing factor to this.
- The positive impact on the local area was just not just economic. There were large social benefits and increases to quality of life. Cultural programs promoted education and the employment opportunities which allowed a wide range of skills to be developed.
- For the top 10 attractions for the Visitor Economy in Buckinghamshire, it was noted that the most popular were National Trust properties (i.e. Cliveden and Waddesdon Manor).
- The visitor economy was more concentrated in the South of the county, with the majority of this in the Beaconsfield Constituency.
- 9% of Bucks workforce was in the Visitor Economy (compared to 10% in England). There was a £1.2 billion contribution to Bucks GVA (Gross Value Added). This accounted for 9.8% of Bucks total GVA (higher compared to surrounding LEP areas. Herts 9.5%; Oxon 9.2%; Berks 7.4%).
- The accommodation supply for the Visitor Economy was focused around the Chiltern Hills for leisure use. For business use, it was concentrated around the Milton Keynes area. The accommodation capacity was split 72% non-serviced and 28% serviced accommodation. Notably 85% of the non-serviced accommodation were AirBnB properties.
- Visit Bucks was the DMO (Destination Management Organisation) for Buckinghamshire. It supported the promotion of the geography and its key constituents, including accommodation, restaurants, attractions, events,

transportation, guided tours and any other retailers catering to travellers.

- The Visitbuckinghamshire.org website received 30,000 visits per month, and had wide reach on Social media. The organisation worked in partnership with over 300 tourism businesses.
- As well as promoting the visitor economy via newsletters to subscribers and weekly themed content on the website, Visit Bucks also attend industry events and encourage businesses to collaborate and develop their offer. They also help businesses to identify possible funding opportunities and support them with grant applications.
- The Council currently provide Visit Bucks with £15k funding per annum which was further topped up by Bucks Business First.
- It was noted that 93% of visits to Buckinghamshire are day visitors so it would be useful to encourage more people to stay, as overnight visitors tended to spend more money locally. It might be useful to promote itineraries whereby visitors could take in several attractions over a weekend or a week, perhaps with different themes.
- Improved transport links could help to boost the visitor economy, as it would help staff and visitors alike to reach attractions. Often it is the last mile or two that proves challenging.
- Visit Buckinghamshire Boost was a programme ran in collaboration with Buckinghamshire Business First and various partner organisations, designed to accelerate tourism, hospitality, and leisure businesses and the wider visitor economy in Buckinghamshire.
- The programme covered various topics with packages aimed at boosting Green Credentials, Accessibility, Digital Skills, Workforce and Growth.
- Buckinghamshire Culture was initially developed from Buckinghamshire County Council and became a separate charity registered October 2021. The organisation aimed to nurture cultural development in Bucks.
- Buckinghamshire lacked a particularly large international tourist attraction that defined it, however it had plenty of medium and small sized attractions. The County's particular strengths were identified as it's Literary Heritage, Sports Heritage, Places of Historical & Cultural Interest, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Cultural & Creative Economy.
- Several events had been held, such as the Summer of Stories, Bucks in 100 Objects, and an Open Weekend (2022 theme was trees and green).

During discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included:

- Work had been undertaken to look at work done in surrounding counties to emulate their successful approach to the Visitor Economy.
- Chiltern Hills was considered the strongest brand due to attraction based on an active lifestyle and for family holidays
- More work should be done to establish Buckinghamshire as the home of the Paralympics. However, a recent visit from Sophie Morgan, tv presenter, demonstrated that accessibility around Bucks was disappointing for wheelchair users, so improvements in this area could help to attract more visitors. Accessibility was not just about catering for people with mobility

problems – adjustments for visually or hearing impaired people also needed to be considered.

- A Member felt the National Trust attractions were primarily contributing towards the National Trust. Furthermore, the National Trust properties didn't need further advertisement from Council/DMO resources as they were already a part of the National Trust network.
- An accommodation guide for visitors to Bucks was suggested, as well as leaflets available in Council Offices for visitors to peruse. It was noted that accommodation Guides were in danger of going out of date quickly. Some local towns/villages have produced these in the past. An online version might be easier to keep updated.
- Given the value of tourism to the Buckinghamshire economy, the Chairman questioned whether more investment was available from the Council. The Leader explained there were pressures in the Council budget, as BC was facing increased costs due to the ongoing inflationary challenges. It was suggested leveraging volunteers would help increase utility in the Visitor Economy.
- The development of a Visitor Economy Strategy was strongly encouraged, as recommended in the report. It was felt the Council could offer a comprehensive approach to combine and maximise the resources available across the county. Lisa Michelson, Service Director, Economic Growth and Regeneration would be leading on the development of the Visitor Economy Strategy for Buckinghamshire.
- Any strategy would need to have a practical Action Plan alongside it, identifying 'quick wins' for the short term and then perhaps 5 year and 10 year goals. It would also be important to have clear performance indicators in the strategy to enable its success to be measured.
- It was also noted that a renewed evidence base for Buckinghamshire's Visitor Economy was needed as the landscape was different post-Covid and this would help to inform the direction for the strategy.
- Leaflets and information should be made available in Council offices to promote attractions across Buckinghamshire. The Leader agreed this would be useful and would look into its implementation. Visitor information was also available to the public from libraries in Buckinghamshire.
- The identity for Buckinghamshire with regards to the visitor economy was difficult to establish. Storytelling was considered due to the rich literary and cultural history.
- Staffing challenges in the hospitality sector were prevalent throughout the country and there was a global shortage. Buckinghamshire faced a shortage exacerbated by a lack of affordable accommodation.
- A Member suggested a 'Bucks Card' that could include entrance to visitor attractions and public transport and maybe discounts at restaurants or other local businesses. This could also be done via an App.
- Several Members expressed their support to establish a business case for increased spending on the visitor economy. This could then be used to justify a budget increase towards tourism initiatives and the Destination Management organisation.

- 7 Work Programme - Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee**
The Work Programme for 2022-23 was agreed. Members were advised to contact the Scrutiny Officer for the committee with any additional topics they wished to be included in the Growth, Infrastructure and Housing work programme.
- 8 Work Programme - Communities and Localism Select Committee**
The Work Programme for 2022-23 was agreed. Members were advised to contact the Scrutiny Officer for the committee with any additional topics they wished to be included in the Communities and Localism work programme.
- 9 Date of Next Meeting - Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee**
The next meeting of the Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee would be on 6th October 2022 at 10am.
- 10 Date of Next Meeting - Communities and Localism Select Committee**
The next meeting of the Communities and Localism Select Committee would be on 5th October 2022 at 10am.