Draft Tourism Network Strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 From a tourism perspective, Gloucestershire splits into three areas:
- Major part of the Cotswolds;
- The Royal Forest of Dean; and
- The Cotswold Edge and Severn Vale;

with a total population of 565,000.

1.2 The importance of tourism to Gloucestershire from an economic, export, and an employment perspective is considerable. Tourism remains vital to the economy of Gloucestershire.

1.3 Each year the county welcomes in excess of 16 million visitors contributing over £1 billion to the local economy. A recent study estimates that there are 1,070 tourism businesses in the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), representing 11.3% of the total number of businesses in the area, and employing 6,720 people (12.3% of total employment in the AONB).

1.4 Tourism contributes directly to local economic growth by increasing spend in the County by domestic and overseas visitors (foreign exchange) and contributes indirectly to local economic growth by improving the exposure and awareness of Gloucestershire in overseas markets and so helps support export.

1.5 This is especially true of The Cotswolds, with its powerful international brand recognition as a tourism destination.

1.6 The Cotswolds region runs

through five counties – Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Wiltshire and Worcestershire.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The tourism industry in the south west of the County of Gloucestershire is fragmented and uncoordinated.

2.2 Whilst geographically the area is already within the Cotswold Destination Management Organisation footprint (see map on page 2 above), it has traditionally experienced a poor secondary place in the shadow of the more easily marketable parts of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

2.2 In order to develop a co-ordinated local identity and a marketable product, different to the Cotswolds and unique in its particular offering, it is proposed to launch this strategy to create a solid platform for local businesses and service providers to build on, until it reaches a critical mass, at which point it will become self supporting.

2.3 Without this initiative the local area will continue to function as a disparate collection of unrelated initiatives, unable to grow towards a sustainable future.

2.4 This project will create a focus based on the uniqueness of the coastal fringe and its long history, heritage and natural resources. There are no current plans for addressing these issues at District or County level, due in the main to the continuing decline of the traditional public sector drivers and the focus on large towns and cities within the region.

2.5 The principles of localism have spawned what in effect is a very local response to an ongoing downward spiral in economic activity in a predominantly rural area.

3. THE VISION

3.1 This strategy is an initiative to stimulate and demonstrate that a joined up approach will increase the viability and potential for new and existing tourism initiatives in the locale and boost the local economy.

3.2 It is partly demonstration and partly developing original infrastructure to fill the existing void.

3.3 Our aims are to:
- Provide a focus for all tourism related organisations in the defined area (see Appendix 1);
- Create a specific marketable product for the area with joined up support and reach to new markets;

- Broaden the range of opportunities for tourist businesses to attract more visitors to the area and extend both the visitor season and the category of visitor (with special focus on export potential of incoming foreign currency).

4. PARTNERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

4.1 Both locally and nationally there are a number of private, commercial and public organisations already providing support to tourism businesses, each with their own distinct roles and functions. These are described in more detail at Appendix 2

4.2 In reality therefore, much information is already accessible for local tourism support and promotion. However, as rehearsed in Chapter 2 above, the exposure is broadbrush and creates very limited information on the smaller attractions and businesses in the south west of the County of Gloucestershire.

4.3 The question arises as to whether it would be more cost effective to simply boost the amount of relevant local input to existing promotional entities or create a new and visible presence for a south west Gloucestershire area?

5. STRATEGY ISSUES

5.1 In approaching the development of a strategy for a new tourism organisation for south west Gloucestershire it is important to understand the characteristics of the proposed partnership in relation to its markets and "customers".

5.2 The SWOT analysis below is presented to evaluate the potential for success. The Cotswold Edge and Severn Vale area is characterised by:
(a) Strengths
- Close to Cotswold AONB
- Close to Cotswold Way
- Easily accessible from M5/M4
- Bristol Airport 28 miles, Bristol Temple Meads Rail Station 19 Miles, Gloucester Rail Station 26 Miles, Cam & Dursley Rail Station within area
- Steeped in history
- Significant existing visitor attractions
(b) Weaknesses
- No visitor information centres west of Cotswold escarpment
- Fragmented and uncoordinated "offering"
- Lacks focus
- Low level online presence

- Perceived dearth of "support" businesses
- Poor visitor transport links

(c) Opportunities
- Untapped heritage:
    Industrial archaeology of the Valleys
    Sharpness docks and canals
    Heritage steam railway
- Untapped history:
    Town walks
    Historic buildings and churches
    Architecture
    Walking along the Cotswold Way
- Unique landscape of coastal fringe

(d) Threats
- Lack of joined up approach
- Failure to recognise need for collaboration and coordination
- Lack of single voice in lobbying local authorities and funding bodies
- Lack of expertise in planning, marketing and funding applications

(e) Gaps in the market
- Themed heritage tours:
    Industrial archaeology/ heritage
    Architecture of the industrial revolution
- Integrated transport:
    Circular bus routes to join up Cam & Dursley Rail Station
    Hop on hop off buses
- Gourmet food trail
    Micro brewers and real ale pubs
    Local produce (cheese, wine, ale, cider).

5.3 This is by no means an exhaustive review and really only provides a template for further development.

6. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

6.1 The way forward offers several potential options to reach the goals set out at Chapter 3 on page 3 above. Considering the direction of travel to reach those goals leads to three potential courses of action:

(i) Establish a new, full blown tourism organisation, dedicated to promotion of the south west Gloucestershire destination and break away from *Cotswolds Tourism*;

(ii) Form an "association" to act as a forum for local businesses and organisations, within the defined area, to work together to improve and

co-ordinate activities and use the existing mechanisms of *Cotswolds Tourism*, established partners and other contributors described in Chapter 4 above to deliver the marketing messages and promote the "new" product;

(iii) Continue with the status quo and lobby the decision makers to provide a greater focus on the south west Gloucestershire area.

6.2 At first sight it would appear that **option 1** would be the most obvious course of action to achieve the objective of putting south west Gloucestershire firmly on the tourist map but the likely costs of setting up and maintaining an efficient and effective structure to deliver are likely to be prohibitive given the burden on a relatively small number and size of businesses in the area. There is also the time lag to be factored in for recruiting and training in-house staff and to establish connections, contracts, partnerships and collaborations. The question also arises as to whether established subscribers to *Cotswolds Tourism* would be prepared to take the risk of moving to a new, as yet untried organisation.

6.3 Option 2 has the advantage of utilising a fully developed and functional system which already operates globally, nationally and locally and would be operational immediately. Extra costs of establishing a new and more local layer of activity would have to be borne by the partners within the area, including those who are already subscribing members of *Cotswolds Tourism*. This would be fairly minor, given the access to free meeting space enjoyed at present based on the goodwill of participating organisations. It would be naïve to assume that the current no cost administrative support provided by Dursley Town Council could continue indefinitely and this would therefore be the first draw on any funds raised.

6.4 The amount of voluntary effort required to deliver a more integrated approach should not be underestimated and would need to be guaranteed for at least two years to set up the necessary mechanisms for collaboration locally. The likelihood that **option 3** would improve the current situation is very low given the current financial climate and competing demands from established businesses and organisations already operating in the core tourism markets. However, it is the low cost approach but would still demand a degree of unity to deliver a "one voice" message to the organisations we wish to influence and is also likely to be a long drawn out process.

7. FUNDING

7.1 No matter which option is pursued there will be a need to find and maintain sources of income. *Cotswold Tourism* is sustained by subscription

from individual businesses and local authority partners. For example, subscription rates for businesses start at £240 for basic membership through to £1200 for platinum membership with intermediate grades.

7.2 Some of the local councils will also provide support from Jobs and Growth funds, based on creation of new employment opportunities and economic development initiatives.

7.3 Periodically applications are also sought from competitive sources such as European Social Investment Fund, European Development Fund, Lottery and other business investment funds. Most require matching funding particularly for capital projects and few will support salaries for project workforces.

7.4 Since the purpose of this initiative is to drive economic growth and job creation in the expanding tourism business, it would be appropriate to seek support from local parish, town and district councils in the first instance. To demonstrate commitment it would also be important to seek financial support from tourist businesses.

7.5 A more modest subscription rate than the *Cotswold Tourism* fee would need to be applied, in order to draw support from large and small organisations and businesses. However, in the first instance the aim should be to approach parish, town and district councils as soon as possible to ask them to consider supporting the initiative when they are preparing their 2018/2019 budget, by including a donation towards costs. A suitable funding model is required for the future.

8. STRUCTURE OF THE NEW ASSOCIATION *(6 - Option 2)*

8.1 The structure of the Cotswold Edge and Severn Vale Tourism Network is described in more detail in Appendix 3 and Appendix 4, the Constitution, to ensure all participants are aware of how their contribution fits into the bigger picture. This will also satisfy the requirements of development grant applications to ensure the bona fides of recipients.

8.2 The Cotswold Edge and Severn Vale Tourism Network will have a Steering Group to steer the overall strategy and a number of single interest or task oriented sub groups to actually deliver the detail. For example:
- Hospitality providers (B&Bs, hotels, self catering, restaurants, pubs, cafes)
- Attractions operators (theme parks, historic buildings and sites, museums)

- Package developers (heritage, guided tours and walks, special interest breaks)
- Promotional material and marketing
- Finance (grants, subscriptions, franchises)
- Transport networks.

9. OBJECTIVES

9.1 The objectives of Cotswold Edge and Severn Vale Tourism Network shall be to:

(A) Develop a Tourism Strategy and Action Plan which shall identify its role, purpose and key activities.

(B) Provide a voice for local businesses and organisations in the wider tourism forums, to work together to lobby for investment and improvements (e.g. circular hop on hop off transport links) and provide a co-ordinated response on key issues affecting tourism (e.g. Stroud Local Plan and other relevant plans/policies);

(C) Co-ordinate and drive awareness about the myriad of opportunities for visitors and promote the economic benefits of tourism;

(D) Work in partnership to develop integrated and co-ordinated packages to enhance the visitor experience extend the season and keep them here longer;

(E) Promote and support opportunities for training and high level skills development across the tourism industry to enhance the quality of the visitor experience;

(F) Provide a forum for tourism businesses to share information and expertise to drive business confidence and investment;

(G) Collect data and information to support the development of tourism in the defined area through T-Stats and other mechanisms.

(H) Invite representatives from relevant organisations, who will help to promote and advance the aims of the Network, to attend meetings.

9.2 The physical boundaries of the proposed tourism initiative should initially follow the lines suggested in the map at Appendix 1.

9.3 The key aim of this strategy is also to bring the initiative to the attention of all of the potential local partners and to this end the first priorities are:
- Cotswolds Tourism;
- Stroud District Council;
- Town and Parish Councils in the area;
- Local tourism businesses;
- Major local attraction operators.

19.4 An action plan to shape the first year of the new Tourism Network is set out at Appendix 5

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 Tourism is perhaps the only opportunity left to support and develop the rural economy, given the continuing shrinkage of many traditional industries in the Cotswold Edge and Severn Vale area. Whilst the locality is still heavily dominated by agriculture, employment in this sector has dwindled significantly due to more efficient methods of farming. New commercial and industrial development is more and more clustering around motorway junctions for ease of access to logistics networks.

10.2 Whilst there is already a large and thriving tourism industry in the Cotswold area, it is mainly focussed on the established brand of chocolate box villages and rolling countryside in the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

There is also a large and well developed marketing structure, promoting the area globally, nationally and locally. However, the focus around the south west area of Gloucestershire is much lower than the more picturesque and scenic locations.

10.3 Critical review would seem to suggest that some of the problem lies in directing the information about what is available in our area, in a unified and structured form, which could be presented through the existing mechanisms to enhance visitor awareness of what's on offer and draw attention to the unique and different experience available in this area.
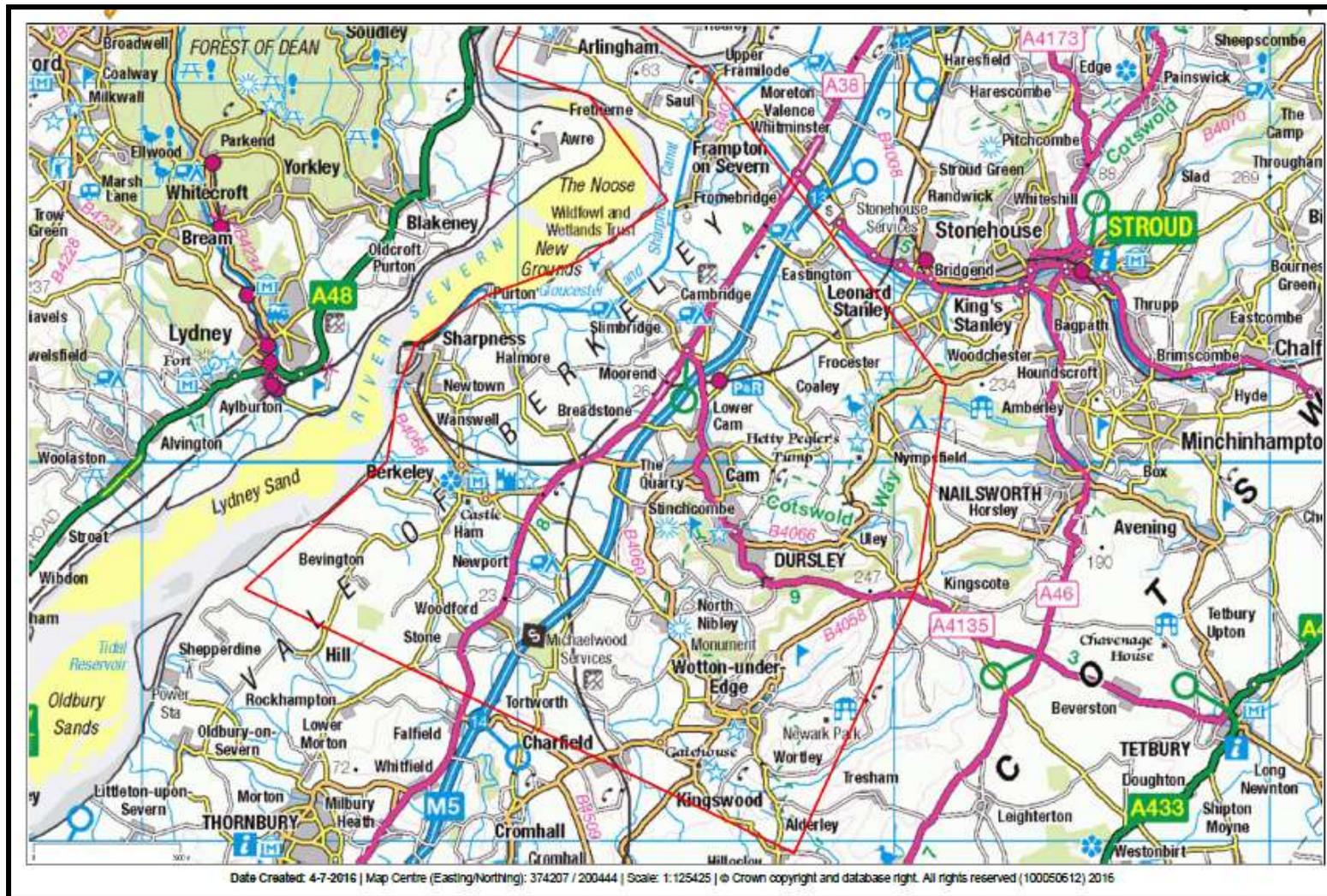
Appendix 1 – Red line indicates agreed boundaries of Cotswold Edge and Severn Vale Tourism Networ

Appendix 2 Partners and Contributors

(A)National Bodies https://www.visitbritain.com/gb/en https://www.visitengland.com/

At national level, tourism is supported by Visit England and Visit Britain. Visit England is the national tourist board and custodian of the England consumer brand and tourism strategy. Visit Britain is the national tourism agency, funded by Government to build the value of tourism to Britain, working in partnership with the tourism industry and the nations and regions of Britain to attract overseas visitors.

(B)County Bodies http://www.gfirstlep.com/gfirst-LEP/Our-Priorities/Projects/

In 2013, responsibility for tourism in Gloucestershire transferred from Gloucestershire County Council to GFirst - The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for Gloucestershire. The LEP works in partnership with the local authorities of Cotswold, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Stroud and Tewkesbury along with the 300+ paying members from across the Cotswolds, which together are known as Cotswolds Tourism. From April 2014 the lead organisation for Cotswolds Tourism ceased to be GFirst. Day-to-day marketing, promotion and national tourism links were managed in the short term by a partnership of local authorities and the Cotswolds Conservation Board. This consortium of the five District Councils is now co-ordinating and implementing the Cotswold Destination Management Plan which acts as a blueprint for the future of tourism in the Cotswold area.

(C)Stroud District Council http://www.visitthecotswolds.org.uk/

As well as working within the partnership described above, the *District Council* supports and promotes local tourism via its webpage, with four tourist information centres at Stroud, Nailsworth, Painswick and Wotton under Edge. The last three are run by local voluntary effort with Painswick open seasonally, April to October. The webpage has some very useful features and includes an accommodation guide, some local history information including industrial heritage, what's on calendar and guide to towns and villages.

(D)*Cotswolds Tourism Partnership* http://www.cotswolds.com

Cotswolds Tourism is a public-private sector partnership responsible for leading tourism development in the Cotswolds, working with tourism businesses and the local authorities across the region to promote and manage tourism to the Cotswolds in a joined up and co-ordinated way. Produced by *Cotswolds Tourism Partnership* and endorsed *by Visit England*, the *Cotswolds Visitor Guide* is the official destination guide for the area and is widely promoted in the UK and worldwide. *Cotswold Tourism* is funded and managed by its Members through subscriptions and the District Councils contributions.

(E)Cotswolds Conservation Board http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk

The Cotswolds Conservation Board is an independent statutory body that works to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswolds AONB, to increase understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities, and to foster the social and economic

well-being of local communities. The board provides information and maps aimed at visitors. It also provides grant funding opportunities.

(F)Cotswolds Information http://www.cotswolds.info/

This website is an extensive resource for the **whole** of the Cotswold region formed by the associated six English counties of Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire and Bath & North East Somerset.

(F)Glide Media http://www.glidemedia.co.uk/

Glide Media helps local leisure, tourism, theatre and event organisations reach more people by maximising the impact of their printed material. Leaflet marketing is an essential tool to spread word of attractions or organisations and *Glide Media* provide a strategic, leaflet distribution service.

(G)Tourism Growth https://tourismgrowth.co.uk/

Tourism Growth specialises in working in partnership with others to help tourism businesses locally, regionally and nationally to improve performance, build profits for re-investment and grow successfully. They run open training courses, workshops and seminars at venues right around the country – from coastal resorts and rural towns to the big cities, providing training programmes specifically developed to meet the needs of the owners, directors and managers of tourism businesses in the UK.

(G)LANTRA www.lantra.co.uk/

Lantra is the UK's sector skills council for land-based and environmental industries and is committed to helping businesses in rural areas access the training, qualifications, skills and knowledge they need. *Tourism Growth* began working in partnership with Lantra in 2013, with the plan to deliver a series of training courses for independent tourism businesses in rural areas across England.

Appendix 3 Structure of the Cotswold Edge & Severn Vale Tourism Network

Structure	Key Documents
Tourism Network (to act as a 'Forum' & work with existing mechanisms; draw information together & gain commitment; hold meetings quarterly) **Network Steering Group** (to be representative of & answerable to the Network; put vision & action plan in place & steer overall Strategy; meet regularly (monthly to start) **Interest Groups** (In all areas to feed into Strategy & action plan; to help package info)	**The Strategy** (strategic overview / vision / objectives) **Action Plan Table** (actions clearly linked to objectives, created by Network & Interest Groups, 1yr – 3yr or 1yr – 5yr)

The **Constitution** outlines the aims and objectives of the Network, its membership and how it operates.

Fitting into the Bigger Picture

The Network strives to closely align strategic objectives with that of local, district, county, regional and national plans/groups.
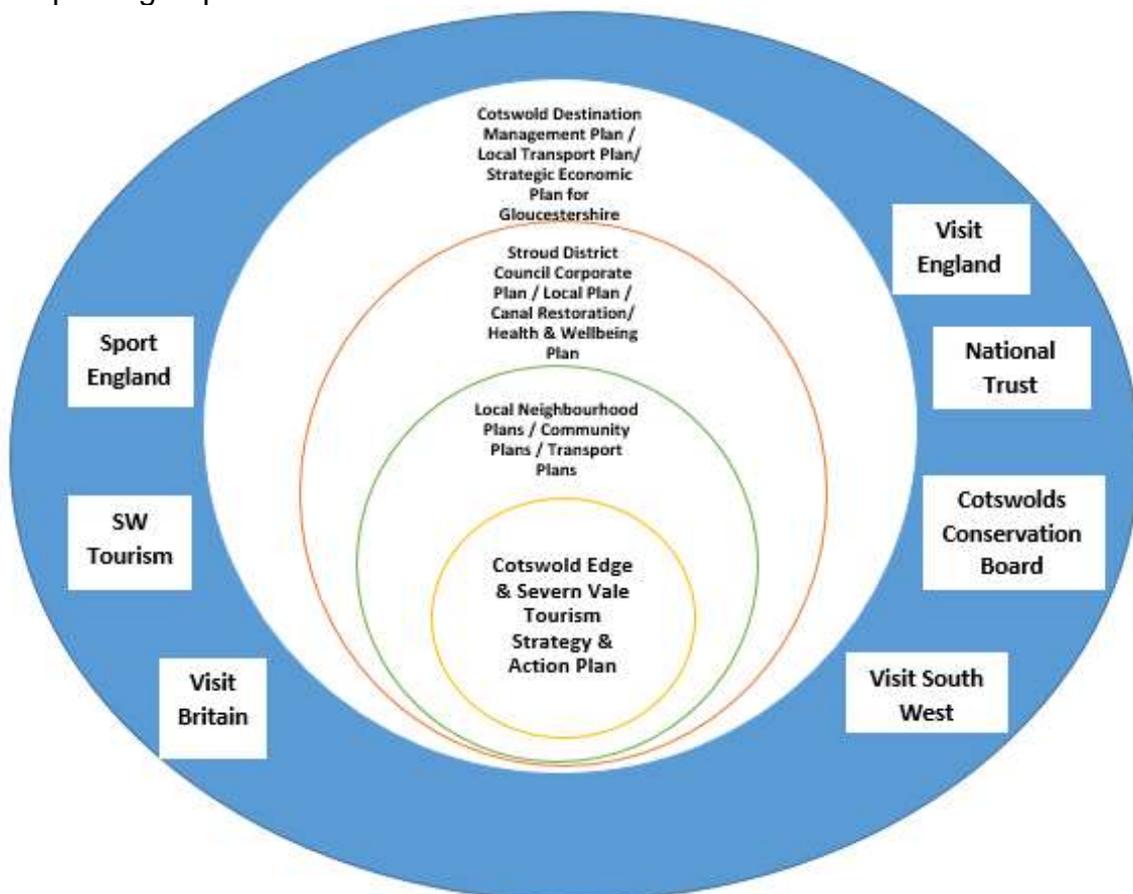
Appendix 4 Cotswold Edge & Severn Vale Tourism Network Constitution

Network Aims
1. To provide a focus for all tourism related organisations in the defined area (see attached map).
2. To create a specific marketable tourism product for the area with joined up support and reach to new markets.
3. To broaden the range of opportunities for tourist businesses to attract more visitors to the area and extend both the visitor season and the category of visitor (with special focus on export potential of incoming foreign currency).

Network Objectives
A. To develop a Tourism Strategy and Action Plan which shall identify its role, purpose and key activities.
B. To provide a voice for local businesses and organisations in the wider tourism forums, to work together to lobby for investment and improvements (e.g. circular hop on hop off transport links) and provide a co-ordinated response on key issues affecting tourism (e.g. Stroud Local Plan and other relevant plans/policies).
C. To co-ordinate and drive awareness about the myriad of opportunities for visitors and promote the economic benefits of tourism.
D. To work in partnership to develop integrated and co-ordinated packages to enhance the visitor experience, extend the season and keep them here longer.
E. To promote and support opportunities for training and high level skills development across the tourism industry to enhance the quality of the visitor experience.
F. To provide a forum for tourism businesses to share information and expertise to drive business confidence and investment.
G. To collect data and information to support the development of tourism in the defined area through T-Stats and other mechanisms.
H. To invite representatives from relevant organisations, who will help to promote and advance the aims of the Network, to attend meetings.

Network Membership
- The Network is an informal structure, organised by the host organisation, Dursley Town Council, which provides admin and support to arrange meetings.
- It is open to any individual or organisation with an interest in tourism, based in or operating in the defined geographical area outlined in the attached map.
- Each organisation may send up to 2 representatives to meetings.
- All members shall have equal voting rights and a quorum shall be 12 members.
- The Network will appoint a Chairman from amongst its members and may appoint a Vice Chairman as required. The role of the Chairman will be to oversee and chair meetings, define the agenda and ensure actions are followed up as necessary.
- The Network Steering Group, shall have a minimum of 7 members, including the Chairman, who shall be broadly representative of the overall membership of the Tourism Network. The group will review its membership from time to time.
- All members of the Network Steering Group shall have equal voting rights and a quorum shall be 3 members.
- The Network Steering Group will coordinate activities to progress the Strategy and Action Plan and establish sub groups to undertake specific projects (such as gathering and collating information from Members and other organisations).
- The host organisation arrangements will be reviewed after 6 months.
- All members commit to working together on the Tourism Strategy, its aims and objectives.

Network Meetings

- The Network will meet **4** times a year, although additional meetings may be called to consider urgent agenda items.
- The Network Steering Group and any sub groups reporting directly to it, will meet as and when required.
- The host organisation will prepare for and notify members of each meeting and will report back in the form of minutes and reports.
- Venues for meetings will be provided by Network members wherever possible.
- Decisions of all of these groups shall be agreed by a simple majority of those present.
- The Network Steering Group will present a report on progress at each Network meeting.

Appendix 1 – Map of Cotswold Edge and Severn Vale Tourism Network boundaries

Appendix 2 - Membership – Name of organisations and representatives at first Network meeting when Constitution agreed:

Appendix 5 – Draft Action Plan 2017/18

Activity	Responsibility	Start Date	Completion Date	Resource Implications	Comments
PHASE 1					
Establish Steering Group	Tourism Network	15 Feb 17		Volunteer time	Network Meeting, 30 Jan 17 minutes item 6a.
Establish Interest Groups	Tourism Network	30 Jan 17		Volunteer time	More volunteers required.
Agree Strategy	Tourism Network	July 2017		Volunteer time	
Agree Constitution	Tourism Network	July 2017		Volunteer time	
Share Strategy with organisations listed at 9.3 above	Steering Group			Volunteer time	
Interest Groups to contact town and parish councils to complete templates	Steering Group & Interest Groups			Volunteer/ Council time	Started - work ongoing
Issue media and press releases	Steering Group			Volunteer time	
Completion and return of information templates	Parishes			Volunteer time	Completed so far - Dursley, Wotton, Cam, Hinton
Interest Groups review returns and collate	Interest Groups			Volunteer time	
Establish channels for feeding collated information from interest groups to partners	Steering Group & Interest Groups	June 2017		Volunteer / Council time	Short term solution set up via www.dursleytowncouncil.gov.uk
Hold meeting with:					
Cotswold Tourism;				Volunteer time	
Stroud District Council;				Volunteer time	
Town and Parish Councils in the area;				Volunteer time/ meeting room	

Local tourism businesses;				Volunteer time/ meeting room	
PHASE 2 - Projects					
Establish future funding model	Tourism Network			Volunteer time	
Establish list of "products" for targeting visitor press	Steering Group & Interest Groups			Volunteer time/ Marketing costs	
Identify Flag Ship Project/Product for 2018	Tourism Network			?	
The shuttle bus/Taxi sharing Feasibility Study	Harris Ethical	March 2017	June 2017	Harris Ethical time – no cost	Report published June 2017
Agree actions from the above Feasibility Study	Tourism Network	July 2017		?	
Three C's Rail Promotion	Harris Ethical			TBC	
Development of a Locality Guide (a series of leaflets for our area)	Harris Ethical			TBC	
Review of Name for marketing purposes	Tourism Steering Group & Network	October 2017		Volunteer time/branding costs?	