

Derry City & Strabane District

Shaping Our Tourism Future 2026~2031



Derry City & Strabane
District Council
Comhairle
Chathair Dhoire &
Cheantar an tSrátha Báin
Derry Cille & Strabane
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1.0 Introduction

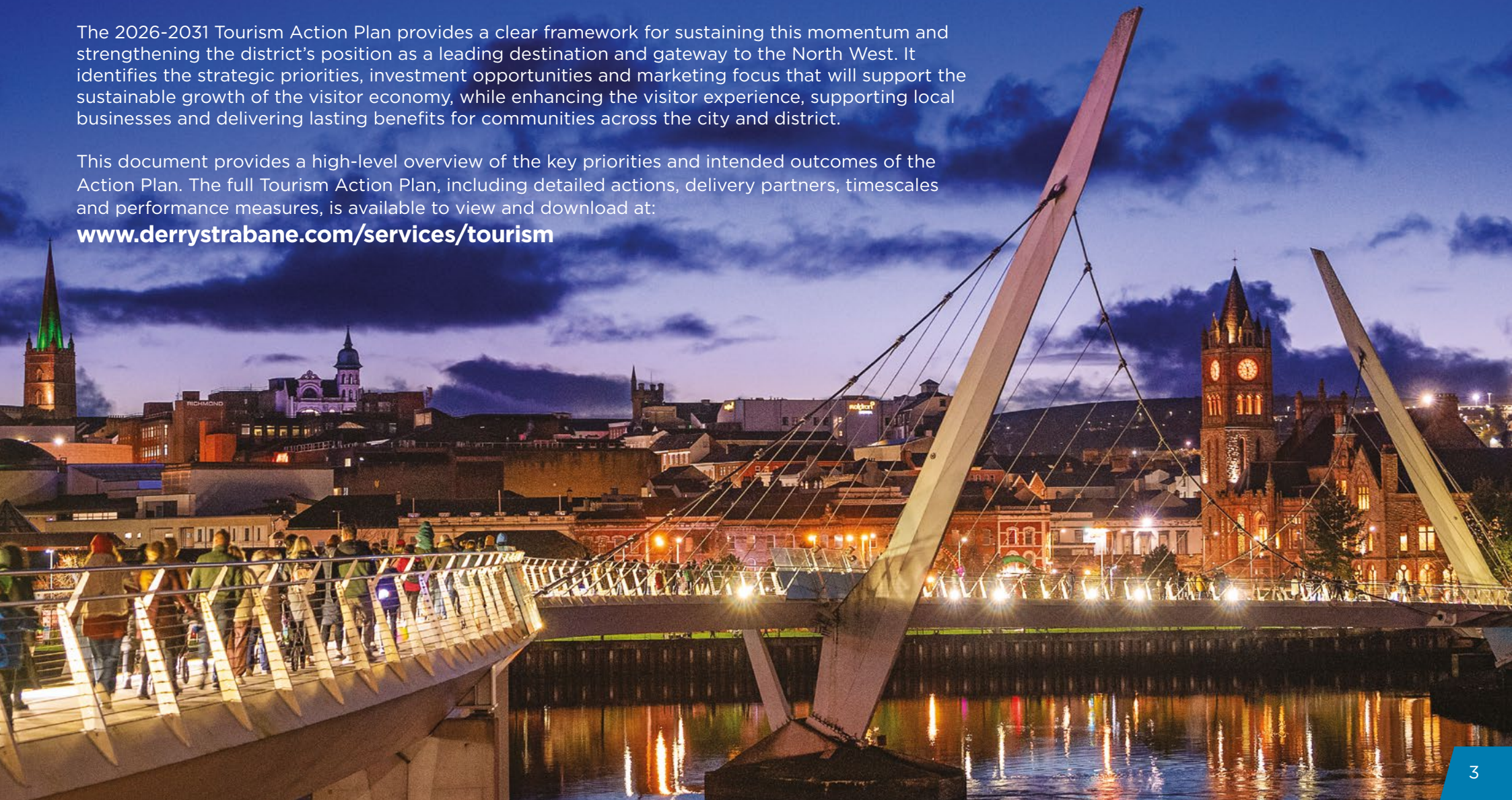
1.1 About the Action Plan

Tourism is a key driver of economic growth, employment, investment and placemaking across Derry City and Strabane District. Building on the progress achieved through previous tourism strategies, strong partnership working and significant public and private investment in the destination, the district has established itself as one of Northern Ireland's fastest growing tourism destinations.

The 2026-2031 Tourism Action Plan provides a clear framework for sustaining this momentum and strengthening the district's position as a leading destination and gateway to the North West. It identifies the strategic priorities, investment opportunities and marketing focus that will support the sustainable growth of the visitor economy, while enhancing the visitor experience, supporting local businesses and delivering lasting benefits for communities across the city and district.

This document provides a high-level overview of the key priorities and intended outcomes of the Action Plan. The full Tourism Action Plan, including detailed actions, delivery partners, timescales and performance measures, is available to view and download at:

www.derrystrabane.com/services/tourism





1.2 About the Destination

Derry City and Strabane District combines a rich cultural heritage, vibrant city experience and diverse rural landscapes within one destination. At its heart is the city of Derry-Londonderry, internationally recognised for its historic walls, strong cultural identity, thriving creative sector and year-round programme of festivals and events.

Beyond the city, Strabane and the wider rural district offer visitors access to scenic river valleys, vibrant towns and villages and a range of outdoor and nature-based experiences. The district is home to a significant portion of the Sperrin Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), one of Ireland's most unspoilt landscapes, renowned for its dramatic uplands, walking trails, geological heritage and rich cultural traditions.

Located where the Wild Atlantic Way meets the Causeway Coastal Route, the district is uniquely positioned as the gateway to the wider North West region. This strategic location supports the district's growing role in cross-border tourism and regional visitor dispersal.

1.3 Tourism Policy Context

Tourism development in Derry City and Strabane District is influenced by a range of local, regional, national and all-island strategies. These include:

- the Department for the Economy's (DfE's) Tourism Vision & Action Plan: 10 Year Plan,
- the Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government, the Government of Ireland Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030,
- the Tourism Ireland Corporate Plan,
- Derry City & Strabane District Council's Inclusive Strategic Growth Plan.

Collectively, these strategies recognise tourism as a key driver of economic growth, employment, regional balance, sustainability and placemaking, while supporting stronger connectivity and collaboration across the island of Ireland.

As the principal framework for tourism development in Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy's Tourism Vision & Action Plan 2035 has been used as the primary reference point for aligning the actions within this plan, ensuring local delivery contributes to wider regional tourism priorities.

1.4 DfE's Tourism Vision & Action Plan 2035: 10 Year Plan

The Department for the Economy's (DfE's) Tourism Vision & Action Plan: 10 Year Plan sets out a shared ambition to grow Northern Ireland's tourism economy and increase overnight visitor expenditure to more than £2 billion by 2035.

The Plan developed by DfE consists of **17 Actions Delivering 4 Strategic Outcomes**;



Productivity

- A1 Establish a Tourism Partnership Board
- A2 Develop and Promote Peace Tourism
- A3 Deliver Multi-year Experience Development Programmes
- A4 Develop and Implement Destination Stewardship Plans
- A5 Review Tourism Delivery Mechanisms
- A6 Ensure an Adequate Mix and Scale of Tourism Accommodation
- A7 Develop Long-term Programme of Events
- A8 Deliver City & Growth Deals to Create New Tourism Offerings
- A9 Extend Fáilte Ireland Regional Experience Brands into the North



Regional Balance



Good Jobs

- A10 Deliver a Tourism Skills Plan
- A11 Grow International Tourism Markets
- A12 Deliver a NI Integrated Business Events Strategy
- A13 Press for a Solution to the Electronic Travel Authorisation Scheme's Impact
- A14 Bringing Forward an Aviation Policy to Improve International Connectivity
- A15 Increase Visitor Value from Sea and Cruise Tourism
- A16 Build the Capacity of Tourism Businesses to Take Action to Reduce their Carbon Footprint
- A17 Launch and deliver Sustainability Recognition Scheme



Decarbonisation

1.5 Tourism In Northern Ireland ~ the Current Situation

Northern Ireland's tourism industry continues to demonstrate strong growth, providing a positive backdrop for the development of tourism across Derry City and Strabane District.

METRIC	2025 PERFORMANCE	% GROWTH (2024)
OVERNIGHT TRIPS	5.1 million	+9%
VISITOR SPEND	£1.2 billion	+9%
NIGHTS STAYED	15 million	1%

REASON FOR VISIT (2025)	
HOLIDAY / SHORT BREAK / LEISURE / RECREATION	53%
VISITING FRIENDS / RELATIVES	34%
BUSINESS / OTHER	12%

Key trend for Northern Ireland

A shift towards more frequent, shorter duration stays with higher visitor spend per night, creating favourable conditions for destinations to expand their market share.

What this means

- ✓ Strong demand for short-break tourism
- ✓ Growing visitor spend across the region
- ✓ Positive market conditions for tourism growth
- ✓ Opportunity for destinations to increase their share of the market



1.6 Tourism in the Derry City and Strabane District Council area

Derry & Strabane Tourism Performance (2025)

Tourism in Derry City and Strabane District continues to perform strongly, with significant growth in visitor numbers, overnight stays and tourism expenditure. The latest data highlights a destination gaining market share, attracting higher visitor spend and creating increasing economic value for local businesses and communities.

METRIC	2025 PERFORMANCE	% GROWTH (2024)	REASON FOR VISIT	
OVERNIGHT TRIPS	400,000	35.6%	HOLIDAY / SHORT BREAK / LEISURE / RECREATION	26%
VISITOR SPEND	£93.6 million	13.6%	VISITING FRIENDS / RELATIVES	61%
NIGHTS STAYED	1.2 million	28.1%	BUSINESS / OTHER	14%

Key trend

The district recorded a 35% increase in overnight trips in 2025 compared with the Northern Ireland average of 9%, demonstrating strong destination appeal and increasing visitor demand.

What this means

- ✓ More visitors choosing Derry City and Strabane District
- ✓ Visitors staying longer and spending more
- ✓ Greater economic impact for local businesses and communities
- ✓ Fastest-growing destination in Northern Ireland (35% vs NI average of 9%)
- ✓ Increased accommodation capacity supporting future growth
- ✓ Strong opportunity for future growth, with potential to increase its 7.8% share of Northern Ireland’s visitor market and visitor spend.

1.7 Who is Visiting and Where Visitor Spend Comes From

Understanding who visits the district and where tourism revenue is generated provides important insights for future investment and marketing priorities.

Tourism in the district is supported by a diverse mix of domestic, Great Britain and international visitors. While visitors from Northern Ireland account for a significant proportion of overnight trips, international markets generate the largest share of tourism expenditure, underlining their importance to the local visitor economy.

Understanding both visitor volume and spend helps identify the markets that deliver the greatest economic impact and informs future destination development and marketing activity.

VISITOR SPEND (2025)	
INTERNATIONAL MARKETS	£47m (51%)
GREAT BRITAIN	£25m (27%)
NORTHERN IRELAND	£21m (22%)





OVERNIGHT TRIPS (2025)

INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

190,000 (48%)

GREAT BRITAIN

122,000 (30%)

NORTHERN IRELAND

87,000 (22%)



OVERNIGHT BED NIGHTS (2025)

INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

546,000 (45%)

GREAT BRITAIN

428,000 (35%)

NORTHERN IRELAND

233,000 (20%)

2.0 Our Tourism Ambition for 2031

2.1 Core Values of the Derry City and Strabane District Plan

The core values below provide the foundation for the Derry City & Strabane District Tourism Action Plan, shaping how tourism is developed, managed and promoted to ensure growth delivers lasting benefits for visitors, businesses, communities and the environment.

Placemaking

Creating and marketing a vibrant destination that enhances local pride and visitor appeal.

Sustainability

Supporting responsible, low-carbon tourism that protects natural and cultural assets.

Accessibility & Inclusion

Ensuring tourism is welcoming and accessible to everyone.

Regional Balance

Spreading the benefits of tourism across the city and district.

Collaboration

Working in partnership to achieve shared tourism ambitions.





2.2 Where We Want to Be: Our 2031 Ambition

These targets have been informed by recent destination growth trends and are designed to support the DfE's Tourism Vision & Action Plan: 10 Year Plan ambition of increasing overnight visitor expenditure to more than £2 billion while delivering regional balance, productivity and good jobs across Northern Ireland.

TARGET	GROWTH	OUTCOME
£120m VISITOR SPEND	+28%	Supporting greater economic impact and contributing to Northern Ireland's visitor economy growth ambitions
£280 AVERAGE SPEND PER VISITOR	+20% (from c.£234)	Supporting a higher-value, more productive visitor economy
6,250+ TOURISM JOBS	+16% (+850 jobs)	More good jobs, skills development and prosperity across the district

2.3 Destination Propositions

Our destination propositions define the experiences, places and stories that make Derry City and Strabane District distinctive. They provide a shared focus for tourism development, helping to shape investment, experience development, destination marketing and partnership activity while supporting sustainable growth and increased visitor value across the district.

The Walled City ~ Where the Wild Atlantic Way meets the Causeway Coast

Uniquely positioned at the meeting point of Ireland's two iconic coastal touring routes, the Walled City is the perfect base for exploring the North West of Ireland.

The Walled City

The destination's defining asset and the only completely walled city in Ireland, offering a unique opportunity to experience over 1,400 years of history, heritage and culture within an internationally significant historic setting.

History, Heritage and Peace Tourism

Explore stories that have shaped Ireland and the wider world, from St Colmcille and maritime heritage to emigration, the Troubles and the Peace Process. As an internationally recognised City of Peace, Derry-Londonderry offers visitors unique opportunities to engage with stories of conflict transformation, reconciliation and shared futures through our unique museums, guided tours, heritage sites and experiences.



Creativity & Culture

A vibrant cultural destination, renowned for its year-round programme of festivals and events that attract visitors from far and near. Complemented by world-class music, theatre, literature and art experiences, creating distinctive reasons to visit while celebrating our unique character, heritage and contemporary culture.



Food & Drink

Food and drink are central to the visitor offer with authentic LegenDerry experiences on offer creating that create a connection to the destination through local flavour and quality produce.



Outdoor & Adventure

Home to the Sperrin Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, one of Ireland's most unspoilt and scenic landscapes and with exceptional opportunities to experience the outdoors. Visitors can explore a network of walking and cycling trails, discover rivers, forests and open countryside, and enjoy activities including angling and more. Complementing this rich natural offering is access to world-class golf, all set within the spectacular landscapes of the North West.



3.0 Delivering the Ambition

The Action Plan will be delivered through three strategic themes, designed to increase visitor value, support business growth and strengthen tourism's contribution to the district's economy. These three strategic themes are:

1. Product & Experience Development

2. Visitor Experience & Servicing

3. Destination Marketing



3.1 Product & Experience Development



Our Focus

Investing in places, infrastructure and visitor experiences to create a more attractive, vibrant and competitive destination that increases visitor spend, dwell time and year-round visitation. Growing midweek and off-peak demand will be a key priority in achieving balanced and sustainable growth across the destination.

Alignment to DfE's Tourism Vision & Action Plan: 10 Year Plan

- A2 Develop and promote Peace Tourism
- A3 Deliver multi-year experience development programmes
- A4 Develop and implement Destination Stewardship Plans
- A6 Ensure an adequate mix and scale of tourism accommodation
- A7 Develop long-term programme of events
- A8 Deliver City & Growth Deals to create new Tourism Offerings
- A9 Extend Fáilte Ireland Regional Experience Brands into the North
- A12 Deliver the NI Integrated Business Events Strategy
- A15 Increase visitor value from sea and cruise tourism

What we will deliver

Major Destination Investments

The delivery of City Deal and associated regeneration projects will provide the cornerstone of the district's tourism infrastructure investment programme over the lifetime of this action plan, creating transformational opportunities for tourism growth and destination development. These include:

- DNA Museum at Ebrington.
- Strabane Town Centre Public Realm Projects.
 - Central Riverfront Regeneration.
 - Walled City Regeneration Project.

Private Sector investments

Supporting and encouraging private sector investment in new tourism accommodation, visitor attractions, market-ready experiences, hospitality developments and supporting infrastructure that enhance the visitor offer, increase destination competitiveness and contribute to sustainable tourism growth across the district.

Developing distinctive, market-ready and bookable experiences, aligned to our destination propositions, and enhancing the visitor offer across both day and night-time economies.

Destination Development

- Strengthening the Walled City's role as the destination's signature visitor experience.
 - Growing festivals, events and year-round destination animation.
- Developing and promoting the district's unique history, heritage and peace tourism offer.
 - Developing business tourism (MICE) opportunities.
- Supporting the delivery of the Sperrins AONB Management Plan and enhancing the wider outdoor, nature-based, adventure tourism offer across the district.
- Capitalising on the destination's unique position 'Where the Wild Atlantic Way meets the Causeway Coastal Route'.
- Positioning the city as the preferred base for accessing the North West's world-class golf offering.
- Support community-led tourism, heritage and local assets to grow visitor footfall and community benefit.

3.2 Visitor Experience & Servicing



Our Focus

Delivering a seamless, welcoming and accessible visitor experience across the city and district.

Alignment to DfE's Tourism Vision & Action Plan: 10 Year Plan

- A1 Establish a Tourism Partnership Board
- A4 Develop and implement Destination Stewardship Plans
- A10 Deliver a Tourism Skills Plan
- A13 Bring forward an aviation policy to improve international connectivity
- A15 Increase visitor value from sea and cruise tourism
- A16 Build the capacity of Tourism Businesses to take action to reduce their Carbon Footprint
- A17 Launch and deliver a sustainability recognition scheme

What we will deliver

People & Skills

- Tourism workforce development.
- Industry training, skills development and career pathways.
- Stronger business collaboration, partnership working and sector leadership.
- Support for tourism businesses to adopt sustainable practices and participate in recognised sustainability accreditation programmes.
- Development of Destination Stewardship Plans to support responsible tourism growth, protect local communities and the environment, and enhance long-term destination sustainability.

Enhancing Information & Visitor Services

- Enhanced wayfinding, visitor orientation and destination signage.
- Improved visitor information, welcome services and Gateway Visitor Information Centre provision.
- Smart, digital and AI-enabled visitor information services.
 - Greater accessibility and inclusive visitor experiences.
- A seamless visitor journey that encourages exploration of the city, district and wider North West region.

Digital Innovation

- Smart destination and visitor solutions.
- Enhanced digital visitor information platforms.
- Real-time, data-driven and AI-enabled visitor services.

Connectivity & Access

- Strengthening regional, national and international connectivity.
- Advocating for improved road, rail and public transport infrastructure.
- Supporting sustainable and low-carbon travel choices.
- Supporting the growth of City of Derry Airport, Foyle Port and NW Transport Hub as key tourism gateways.

3.3 Destination Marketing



Our Focus

Building a strong destination brand, growing visitor demand and increasing economic impact through coordinated marketing, sales and marketing activity, integrated campaigns, co-operative partnerships and data led decision making.

Alignment to DfE's Tourism Vision & Action Plan: 10 Year Plan

- A1 Establish a Tourism Partnership Board
- A2 Develop and promote Peace Tourism
- A11 Extend Failte Ireland's regional experience brands into the North
- A9 Grow international tourism markets
- A12 Deliver the NI Integrated Business Events Strategy
- A14 Bring forward an aviation policy to improve international connectivity
- A15 Increase visitor value from sea and cruise tourism

What we will deliver

Place & Brand

- Destination placemaking that strengthens the district's reputation as a great place to visit, live, work, study and invest in.
- Strengthened destination positioning.
- Consistent destination storytelling.
- Developing perception research and insights to inform destination development, marketing activity and brand positioning.

Marketing & Promotion

- Multi-channel campaigns across domestic and international markets.
- Digital marketing, content creation and destination storytelling aligned to priority themes.
- Cooperative marketing with strategic partners to maximise reach and impact.
- Conversion-focused activity to increase overnight stays and visitor spend.
- Market diversification in line with Tourism Ireland priorities.
- Media, influencer and travel trade engagement to generate high-value destination coverage.

Partnership Delivery

- Integrated Placemaking Campaigns with Visit Derry, Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland and other relevant partners.
- Collaboration with airlines, tour operators, the travel trade, online travel agents and Destination Marketing Organisations.
- Increased inclusion in international itineraries and travel programmes.
- Visitor itineraries and destination experiences that encourage longer stays.
- Partnership-led promotion of priority themes, events and business tourism opportunities.



Research & Insights

- Data-led destination marketing informed by visitor and market insights.
- Destination perception, visitor behaviour and market intelligence research.
- Performance measurement to maximise reach, conversion and economic impact.

3.4 What Success Looks Like in 2031

Strategic Outcomes



A Thriving Visitor Economy

Visitor spend exceeds £120 million per annum, with increased average spend per visitor and greater economic impact across the district.



A Recognised and Distinctive Destination

The district is widely recognised as a leading destination with a strong reputation in domestic and international markets and growing recognition for its unique locations and distinct visitor offer.



A Vibrant, Year-Round Destination

Visitors can enjoy a diverse range of high-quality, bookable experiences, attractions, events and festivals throughout the year, creating demand beyond the peak season and encouraging longer stays.



An Outstanding Visitor Experience

High levels of visitor satisfaction, stronger visitor loyalty and increased repeat visitation.



A Strong, Innovative Tourism Sector

Tourism businesses are investing, collaborating and growing, supported by a skilled workforce and increased adoption of digital and innovative approaches that enhance both productivity and visitor experience.



A Sustainable and Inclusive Destination

Tourism growth benefits communities across the city, Strabane and the wider district, supports local businesses and jobs, protects the area's natural and cultural assets, and contributes positively to quality of life and civic pride.



4.1 Delivering the Strategy

Successful delivery of this Tourism Action Plan will depend on strong partnership working across the public, private and community sectors. A dedicated Tourism Delivery Partnership will provide oversight of the action plan, meeting quarterly to coordinate activity, monitor progress and ensure delivery remains aligned with local priorities and the Department for the Economy's Tourism Vision & Action Plan: 10 Year Plan. It should be noted that delivery of some initiatives within the action plan will be dependent on the ability to access additional funding.

The Tourism Partnership Board will:

- ✓ **Oversee implementation of the action plan**
- ✓ **Monitor progress against agreed targets and key performance indicators**
- ✓ **Identify emerging opportunities and risks**
- ✓ **Coordinate activity across partners to maximise impact**
- ✓ **Champion core values of the action plan**
- ✓ **Act as a link between industry, communities and decision-makers**
- ✓ **Advocate collectively on policy and regulatory issues impacting tourism growth including those relating to Electronic Travel Authorisation, VAT and aviation.**



4.2 Measuring Success

Progress will be monitored through the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland and Visit Derry data, alongside delivery reporting, visitor research and stakeholder feedback.

4.3 Looking Ahead

Derry City and Strabane District has established itself as one of Northern Ireland's fastest-growing tourism destinations. Through targeted investment, partnership working and a focus on high-value tourism growth, this action plan provides a clear framework for maximising the economic, social and cultural benefits of tourism over the next five years.

For the full action plan, including detailed actions, delivery partners, timescales and performance measures, visit: www.derrystrabane.com/services/tourism

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