

## Pleasley Visitor Hub



## Stage 2

## Pleasley Visitor Hub: Moving Forward

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## 1. Pleasley Visitor Hub: The story so far

The focus of the Stage 1 audit and assessment work has been to identify, review and assess the visitor product in and around Pleasley. The main purpose is to test and challenge the Visitor Hub proposition and identify future requirements necessary to realise the potential in terms of product gaps, marketing and promotion, support infrastructure and governance.

In many respects, the Pleasley Visitor Hub area is ‘the hole in the doughnut’ surrounded by world-class destinations in the Peak District and Sherwood Forest, with some deficiencies evident in terms of its visitor product (particularly a lack of serviced accommodation). While its current profile is limited and it does not offer a comparable ‘critical mass’ of visitor products to its neighbouring areas, the assessment demonstrates that an opportunity exists at Pleasley to enhance and develop a complementary offer, and one that provides a coherent link between these two iconic destinations

A number of key ingredients are in place, which form a strong foundation to develop an attractive cycling and heritage (and related hospitality) offer given its central, accessible location, impressive trails network, lack of congestion and gently undulating topography. The 3.7 million residents within a one-hour drivetime catchment represents a high base for leisure tourism users including short breaks.

The Action Plan also builds on current investments, including £650,000 to improve 6.9km of trails throughout the Pleasley Visitor Hub and to carry out a number of feasibility studies (including this study) to build on the findings of the Destination Plan ([www.derbyshire.gov.uk/vscr](http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/vscr)). The current programme of works is set for completion in 2021.

The wider policy and strategic context is now, and is likely to remain, very supportive of cycle tourism development at Pleasley, working cross-border and as part of a wider tourism zone across the D2N2 area. However, further engagement is needed to ensure that key partners and the private sector are involved and fully behind actions to enhance the destination as a place to visit, stay and invest.

## 2. A refreshed destination focus

The Covid-19 pandemic has been an existential threat to the UK's visitor economy. Visit England estimates that there will be a 48% drop in domestic tourism this year and that international visits are unlikely to return to pre-pandemic levels before 2023 at the earliest. The crisis and virus-induced reality of a continued economic downturn is leading destination organisations and the hospitality industry to apply a new perspective on destination development and community involvement.

One of the key features that most industry professionals agree on is the need (and opportunity) to build **recovery through the domestic tourist** and visitor market with a further boost for the staycation market in the UK.

The role of strong (not necessarily big!) **destination management organisations will be critical** in shaping the response and providing a coordinated programme of actions with support for appropriate development and infrastructure, where applicable.

In its summary paper to Government in May 2020 relating to Covid Response and Recovery, the Tourism Society emphasised the importance of strengthening the capacity of DMOs and highlighted the need **"to develop and promote differentiated experiences."** This is very much in line with the approach to Pleasley Visitor Hub, while promoting effective relationships between local businesses, food and service suppliers, local communities and visitors.

In the process of recovery for the visitor economy there is a real opportunity to embrace a **more sustainable approach** for the whole sector which will also help avoid (or at least minimise) conflict between visitors, host communities and the environment and ensure that impacts can be measured and mitigated through effective planning, development and operating regimes, with **social equity and cohesion** at the root / core of all decision making.

In the post COVID recovery period and 'era', the key growth areas are likely to be:

- Domestic tourism overall
- Strong VFR market with likely growth as people stay where they feel secure and safe
- High demand for self-catering (offers greater flexibility and individual 'control' of the visitors' environments)
- Greater demand and appreciation of outdoor based experiences in terms of activities and the natural environment
- Stays in a pub (authentic experiences)
- Dog friendly travel
- More coastal and rural breaks (compared to city breaks at least in the short term)

All of these trends favour the priority target development and promotion for Pleasley Visitor Hub. The action plan focuses on actions to reset and drive recovery in the sector and set in motion practical steps to ensure that tourism businesses are ready and able to welcome visitors focusing on the domestic market. Given these themes, the Pleasley Visitor hub offers an opportunity to contribute to a new 'destination' model, moving away from a traditional focus on ever-growing visitor numbers and tourism receipts towards a more community- led recovery with a focus on:

- Local distinctiveness
- Sustainability
- Social well-being
- Health and outdoor based activities
- Engaging experience

### 3. What do we want to achieve?

#### *Vision*

To create a community-led destination that develops, refines and presents an authentic responsible tourism product with a focus on sustainability and community benefits. The area will be known as a premier outdoor cycling and walking destination of choice, where visitors will receive a genuine welcome and enjoy outstanding experiences of our countryside and heritage. The area will have an enhanced reputation with and support from its neighbouring destinations, who appreciate and benefit from its complementary offer.

#### *Aims*

Our aims are to:

- Secure industry and community leadership to guide strategic direction and participate in delivery
- Maximise the outdoor product and focus on excellent service for visitors
- Raise spend levels particularly by encouraging visitors to stay longer, staying overnight, visiting midweek and in quieter months
- Share the benefits of tourism more widely and enable visitors to explore the wider area with new infrastructure such as trails and visitor experiences
- Improve the cycling and walking visitor experiences and capitalise on opportunities to diversify the product offer
- Stimulate local and community enterprises to invest in the visitor economy
- Optimise wider leverage from planned major investments
- Embed sustainability best practice
- Proactively market the area as a sustainable and responsible destination

The Plan is about developing a confident exemplar of a sustainable destination where tourism businesses thrive whilst sustaining the environment, supported by local communities.

The next section considers a suite of actions to realise the opportunity and reset and drive recovery of the sector.

Indicative Cost (enabling / capital)

£ - up to £10,000

££ - up to £50,000

£££ - over £50,000

## Potential actions for realising the vision and objectives

<b>Destination Connectors</b>					
The focus is to build on the existing destination hubs - Hardwick Hall, Pleasley Pit and Country Park and Pleasley Vale Outdoor Activity Centre - to offer new experiences and attract new audiences. The priority is to develop a cluster and critical mass of product in one location and enhance connectivity between the hubs through the provision of an exemplar trail network and the provision of a quality cycle-friendly hub infrastructure					
No.	Description	Rationale	Indicative cost	Lead	Priority
<b>Pleasley Vale</b>					
	Ensure that the developing proposals for Pleasley Vale meet the vision and objectives of VSCR	An exciting opportunity exists to develop the PVOAC as a must-see 'pay-as you go' outdoor destination experience, which complements the other destination hubs in the area	£££	Bolsover DC	High
<b>Pleasley Pit and Country Park</b>					
	Support Derbyshire Countryside Service, The Land Trust and Pleasley Pit Trust to provide a cluster of 'hub' facilities including cycle storage, maintenance, bike wash, changing facilities, visitor information etc	Significant investment has already been made by The Land Trust at Pleasley Pit. Further opportunities exist to capitalise on this investment to position the pit as a cycle destination hub.	££	PPT/ LT	High

Hardwick Hall					
	<p>Support the National Trust to develop complementary visitor products at Hardwick Hall which encourage visitors to stay longer and connect the attraction with the wider Pleasley Visitor offer, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enhanced trail connections</li> <li>- Cycle hub provision</li> <li>- Extending the self-catering product</li> </ul>	<p>Hardwick Hall is the 'jewel in the crown' in terms of attractions in the region. The management team is keen for the attraction to be outward facing and link with other tourism programmes which improve the quality of the visitor offer and encourage visitors to stay longer in the area and spend more in the local economy.</p>	£££	National Trust	Medium



## Improving the visitor infrastructure

This theme will focus on the provision of high quality, sustainable visitor infrastructure and information with a particular focus on developing, enhancing and maintaining an exemplar trails network<sup>1</sup>

No.	Description	Rationale	Indicative cost	Lead	Priority
	Develop a network of quality useable / connected walking and cycling routes for all abilities in the destination. The priority will be to develop family-friendly routes which connect the key destination connectors.	The area already has a number of well-connected trails. The intention is to build on the area's USP as a premier location for cycling and walking to deliver economic and social benefits across the region. This will include looking to build on a range of <b>walking trails, themed trails</b> (e.g. pub routes) and <b>circular routes</b> (including, for example, partial use of public transport for return leg where possible)	£££	BCP / DCC / BDC	High
	Develop a series of cycling loops and trails targeted at the family friendly and active adult market	Most first-time visitors will gain confidence in the destination through tackling well-marked circular rather than linear routes	£££	BCP / DCC / BDC	High
	Develop a Cycle Events programme in partnership with key partners and stakeholders including National Trust, Derbyshire CC, Bolsover DC, Pleasley Pit Trust etc	Events provide excellent additional marketing opportunities, can be targeted at quieter times of the year/ week, and can bring high numbers of cyclists and non-cyclists if participatory in nature	£	VEC	Low
	Investigate the potential of establishing cycle hire provision at key hubs, including electric bike hire.	Provision of cycle hire would assist visitors to the pit and country park to explore the cycling product in the locality. One option would be to use a virtual operator such as Donkey Republic to test the market	£	VEC	Low

<sup>1</sup> The outcome of the VSCR Trails Audit (Aecom) will provide a priority list for trails development and enhancement

		<a href="https://www.donkey.bike/cities/bike-rental-the-cotswold-water-park/">https://www.donkey.bike/cities/bike-rental-the-cotswold-water-park/</a> <sup>2</sup>			
	Develop one or more 'hero' trails to build on the existing activity product such as the Pleasley Trails Element of the Phoenix Greenways	To be successful, the area will need to offer a strong brand and distinctive positioning in the market place to compete with the many rides on offer. One of the ways of achieving this is through developing 'hero experiences'	£££	BCP / DCC / BDC	Medium
	Encourage development of a fun cycling hub with bike park, bike learning and possible BMX in same site capable of becoming a focal point (and starting point) for family based cycling visits. This could feasibly be developed and promoted as part of the evolving plans for PVOAC	Important to introduce a range of different products and experiences to meet different demographics, including young people	£	BDC	Low
	Identify and designate an outdoor events space and programme for different sporting and performance events capable of accommodating event infrastructure and visitor access for large volumes of attendees	Events can play an important role in extending the season and promoting greater participation	£	VEC	Low
	Work with public transport providers to create a more sustainable method of transport into and around Pleasley Hub and VSCR area	It is recognised that this is likely to be on a seasonal basis and relies on working with a third party	£	VEC	Low

<sup>2</sup> Although predominantly operating in urban centres, donkey bikes are seen as an effective means of testing the market for future bike hire provision specifically for the family / 'dabblers' market

	(consideration needs to be given to how bikes can be carried on public transport - there are examples in mainland Europe e.g. PostBus in Switzerland)				
	Develop comprehensive wayfinding strategy linked to trail network, including 'gateway' / entry signage at key arrival points	Given the scale of the area, effective wayfinding is critical in terms of managing visitor flows and important in terms of the overall visitor experience.	££	BCP / DCC / BDC	Medium
	Introduce additional trail signage linked to location mapping and interpretation. Will require partnership working.	Currently there appears to be limited signage on some routes which makes 'navigating' some areas difficult. Look to improve safety and enjoyment of users with better route signage in key sections.	££	BCP / DCC / BDC	Medium
	Introduce (and promote) key viewing points within destination, possibly including selected positioning of sculptural pieces and viewing platforms.	Adds positively to visitor experience and opportunities for sharing images from viewing points on social media which leads to raising the profile of VSCR ('selfie' moments).	££	BCP / DCC / BDC	Low
	Building on existing volunteer base, consider expanding a team of volunteers (Green Team) with specific role in terms of management and maintenance of the trails network	Structures will need to be put in place to ensure effective and efficient management and maintenance of the enhanced trails network.	£	VEC	Low

	Work with youth groups (guides, scouts and others) to design and implement a range of coordinated programmes including assistance with litter picking and vegetation clearance.	Important to involve young people and local networks in the area, including maintenance work.	£	VEC	Low
	Work with tourism businesses to build the Tourism Network and encourage packaged breaks, other offers and joint marketing focused on VSCR as a destination <sup>3</sup> .	Critical that tourism businesses feel ownership and benefit from the action programme	£	VEC	Low

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<sup>3</sup> This could be extended to include activities funded through the Pedal Peak for Business initiative, e.g. grants support, cycle tourism toolkit etc

## Branding and Marketing<sup>4</sup>

The aim is to develop a clear brand profile and identity for the area highlighting key USPs targeted towards the family friendly and active adults market segments

No.	Description	Rationale	Indicative cost	Lead	Priority
	Develop a brand descriptor, values and proposition for the area based on benefits rather than features or geography, with clear relevance to target market sectors identified by VCSR study (fun-families and active adults).	There are already strong geographic neighbouring brands (Peak District/ Sherwood), so it would be counter-productive and expensive to create another. In addition, the Pleasley hub crosses county and district boundaries. It will be important to consult stakeholders on the brand ideas	£	VEC	Medium
	Develop brand and marketing toolkit for distribution to partners, including target market information	It is important that all stakeholders and host communities have a shared understanding of the destination story and how to use it to best advantage	£	VEC	Medium
	Develop brand collateral – e.g. marketing information, website, shared on-line content	As a ‘new’ destination the Pleasley Hub will depend on a range of stakeholders, businesses, communities and users picking up on the brand and distributing content through a range of on and off-line channels and acting as advocates	££	VEC	Medium
	Maintain online distribution channels	It is unlikely that there will be the resources in the long term for major campaigns so it is important that content remains current, relevant and available to share into other channels.	£	VEC	Low

<sup>4</sup> This work is being taken forward by Fred Marketing

## Product Development

The priority is to design and deliver a quality outdoor active product which will encourage residents and visitors to responsibly enjoy and use the area as a destination for physical activity

No.	Description	Rationale	Indicative cost	Lead	Priority
	Support and encourage the provision of quality self-catering accommodation (including cycle-friendly accommodation) through providing a toolkit / guide linked to quality grading. Targeted to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farm-owners and other landowners considering introducing innovative self-catering units (wooden pods, tree tents, shepherd's huts)</li> <li>• Rooms in pubs</li> <li>• AirBnB and similar</li> </ul>	Build accommodation capacity within the destination. Help to service short break market with attractive, high quality units in accessible locations.	£	VEC	Low
	Implement the Pleasley Pit camping and pod development as an exemplar eco-friendly accommodation offer.	Build up overnight stay capacity and make 'statement' to kick-start product enhancements.	££	BCP / DCC / LT / PPT	High
	Support appropriate third-party accommodation development and aim to attract contributions via S106 / Community Infrastructure Levy – working closely with developers and local authority partners.	Build up overnight stay capacity	£	VEC	Low

	Encourage existing accommodation providers to broaden their product offer where applicable (e.g. camping sites to add range of fixed pod units etc.)	Build up overnight stay capacity	£	VEC	Low
	Work with events team within County and District Councils to <b>coordinate and promote</b> events throughout VSCR area (resource implication where the venue requires additional staff support).	Events, festivals and social activities bring together, and support, greater connectivity between communities and can generate economic benefits outside peak periods.	£	VEC	Low
	Building upon existing events, establish a <b>'year-round' programme of events</b> working with third party event promoters which could include for example competitive sports events, including developing a signature annual event	As above, recognising important economic and social role of events.	£	VEC	Low

## Community Engagement

This theme is more than just involving the community in destination planning. The focus is on putting in place actions which help communities direct, develop and deliver tourism projects at the community level.

No.	Description	Rationale	Indicative cost	Lead	Priority
	Implement mechanisms and targets to involve the community consultation to enhance the visitor product	A responsible and sustainable destination fully embraces businesses, the local environment and host communities in its development	£	VEC partners	Medium
	Promote and develop community-based programmes for taking the project forward e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• skills training</li> <li>• ambassador training</li> <li>• volunteering opportunities</li> <li>• establishing a community tourism development fund</li> </ul>	The project will succeed because local people can see the benefits of it, socially, environmentally, economically and culturally. Local people can act as guardians and will provide a high proportion of year-round usage.	£	VEC partners	Medium
	Develop CSR programmes with major local employers especially where their workers benefit from the trail network	CSR can provide a range of helpful inputs – sponsorship, help in kind, work parties, brand association	£	VEC partners	Low
	Work with health practitioners and prescribe physical activities such as ‘cycling and walking’ to improve health. Taking this a stage further, is there an opportunity to host ‘pop-up’ health surgeries on one or more key sites (outside of the peak periods)?	VSCR presents strong opportunities for delivering formal health related activities	£	VEC partners	Low



## Governance and Partnership

Success will also be dependent on the plan being 'owned' and driven forward by a partnership of the key stakeholders. It will be important to develop sustainable models for ongoing marketing, operation, maintenance and investment

No.	Description	Rationale	Indicative cost	Lead	Priority
	Refresh terms of reference / role of VEC and assess options for developing a new model to drive the project forward and provide leadership and continuity to include LAs, NT, DMOs, Pleasley Vale, Land Trust and community representatives.	Wider Visitor Economy Consortium is important as a forum/ sounding board/ information exchange but may find it difficult to focus on this project.	£	BCP / DCC	High
	In partnership with key partners, assess options for creating a new delivery vehicle to develop, manage and maintain the cycle hubs at the destination hubs.	Economies of scale could be achieved through creating a new management vehicle to deliver and manage cycle hubs.	£	BCP / DCC	High
	Identify a lead nominated individual to work with the core steering group to drive the project forward.	The project will need a clear champion and visible point of contact to succeed.	£	BCP / DCC	High

## 4. Next Steps

The recent and ongoing partnership investment at Pleasley Pit Country Park together with the technical report on the provision of accommodation 'pods' would indicate that a priority will be to grow the destination visitor offer at the Country Park. This should include developing an overall masterplan for the site to ensure that all destination components compliment and spatially work together effectively as a visitor experience.

In addition, a clear articulation of investment priorities of partners at Pleasley Vale and Hardwick Hall would strengthen the spatial relationship with the Country Park, and strengthen the overall offer across the whole of the Pleasley Visitor Hub.

Clearly, capacity and resources will mean that not all the projects can be taken forward and the final stage (Stage 3) of the commission will be to prioritise the project options set out in section 3 in partnership with the client team and other partners against a range of technical and other considerations.

The criteria will include:

- Technical constraints
- Viability
- Strategic fit
- Consider market impact (alongside other specialist consultants)
- Meeting fun-family and active adult markets
- Economic impact
- Sustainability
- Stakeholder / community support
- Enhance facilities for local resident

The outcome will be a destination model that will provide a coherent, compelling and deliverable mix. The Stage 3 report will also provide an assessment of delivery models and governance.