

WISE GROWTH ACTION PLAN

Vision

Grow tourism responsibly in a finite world, creating resilience and prosperity for all, balancing the growth aspirations of the Strategic Framework with the principles of sustainability.

Objectives

1. Embed the principles of Wise Growth into all Action Plans associated with the Strategic Framework for Tourism.
2. Embed the principles of Wise Growth into communications strategies with visitors and residents to enable them to cherish the places they visit, live and work.
3. Help tourism businesses engage in Wise Growth, by articulating the business case and providing access tools and resources.
4. Measure, report and communicate the impacts of Wise Growth transparently.

What is Wise Growth?

This Action Plan uses the term Wise Growth rather than sustainable tourism in order to link and balance the growth aspirations of the Strategic Framework with the principles of sustainability in tourism. These principles are drawn from a range of globally recognised definitions and characterise Wise Growth in tourism as:

- **Inclusive:** visitor experiences are fun, inspirational, safe, open and accessible to all with no discrimination based on gender, race or disability.
- **Engaging:** involving local residents in tourism development through working relationships, consultation and cooperation.
- **Well-being:** tourism activities strengthen and sustain the quality of life of the communities in which they take place by improving access to local resources and amenities for residents.
- **Caring:** the cultural heritage of places, the authenticity and distinctiveness is protected or enhanced through preserving traditions and local culture for both residents and visitors.
- **Distinctive:** the quality of the urban, coastal and rural environment is maintained or enhanced without physical or visual degradation.
- **Fun and appealing:** capitalise on the enjoyment of England's natural and built environments, habitats and wildlife but ensure these are not damaged in the process.

- **Viable:** champion local businesses that operate successfully and responsibly over the long-term. Create and strengthen the number and quality of local jobs supported by tourism activities, including salary, conditions and availability. Ensure local residents benefit from the tourism activity they host, especially by maximising visitor spending retained in the local economy.
- **Efficient:** visitors and businesses use scarce and non-renewable resources wisely; visitors and businesses seek to minimise pollution, especially from transport, and reduce waste from all tourism activity.

Achieving Wise Growth in practice will require more than the Strategic Framework process alone. Its success will depend on the quality of dialogue and relationships between those who are responsible for achieving its aims. These stakeholders include visitors, residents and tourism businesses.

Bringing these different interests together, along with the organisations that represent them, is essential in establishing common ground and effective decision-making. Fundamental to this are the organisations that hold political influence in managing local places, such as Local Authorities and National Park Authorities.

Wise Growth must be about tangible outcomes. By identifying the causes of tourism's positive and negative impacts the industry can maximise opportunities for change and improvement. This can be achieved through an understanding of the relationships that are at the heart of Wise Growth. This cooperative approach means wherever tourism takes place, all stakeholders should be engaged in its management and development.

Why take action on Wise Growth?

The aim of embedding Wise Growth principles in tourism delivery is sustained healthy growth in the industry where the benefits are shared by all and continually reinvested.

Visitors will enjoy enhanced experiences at authentic destinations. Residents will feel the benefits of tourism in a way that doesn't undermine their local sense of place. Tourism businesses will reduce costs through greater efficiency, improving quality, creating new jobs and strengthening local economies in the process. And all this will be delivered in such a way that protects and improves the broader environment, natural and manmade.

Traditionally, the tourism industry has taken a short term, piecemeal approach to its development. This has often limited long term local economic resilience, undermined local cultures and even compromised the quality of place that attracted the visitor in the first place. However, Wise Growth is about taking a coordinated approach to all tourism development making it a long-term power for good, economically and socially, with the aim of enhancing environments and improving the quality of visitor experience. It also takes full account of localised business issues and helps people and places to work together, with those politically responsible for an area, for mutual benefit over the long term.

Embedding Wise Growth across all Action Plans for the Strategic Framework will significantly contribute to the vision and objectives set out here. This particular Action Plan, however, aims to generate greater understanding of Wise Growth and the principles that underpin it to challenge thinking and to inform the delivery of all future action.

Challenges and Opportunities

- Sustainability in tourism is not a new issue but there is little evidence of it being fully adopted by the tourism industry. While there is evidence to suggest a few destinations and some businesses have taken up measures to manage their resources, the impact of this is not understood. There has been a tendency to value the measurable, i.e. numbers in schemes, and not measuring the valuable, i.e. the impact (source: VisitEngland, *Sustainable Tourism in England: Reflecting on Experience*, 2009). Many in the industry believe that strategies and business plans already address Wise Growth – but

this is not the case. This misconception is illustrated by the number of dedicated sustainable tourism strategies that only sit as adjuncts to core business plans and destination strategies.

- Selling sustainability to businesses and consumers purely on environmental grounds has not worked; there needs to be focused messages that speak to industry and consumer priorities alike (source: VisitEngland, *GTBS members research 2009*; VisitEngland, *Industry Benchmark Survey 2010*; VisitEngland, *consumer research 2010*).
- There is a lack of understanding of the business case for Wise Growth, this comes from a combination of inconsistent messaging and evidence as well as disagreement of what should be the core focus of any business case.
- The language that has been used does not inspire action but rather dictates a limiting behaviour, such as what a business or consumer can't or shouldn't do. Often sustainability has been about narrow behaviour, such as don't litter and recycle more, consumer communications in particular can be a barrier - messages should be about passion, inspiration and fun (source: *Futerra, Sell the Sizzle, 2009*).
- There is evidence to suggest that businesses do not have the confidence to promote themselves as being green, on the basis they would be accused of 'Greenwash' or even putting off customers. Research shows around 50% stated they do not promote their green activities and yet marketing is identified as the main commercial reason for any business joining a sustainable tourism certification scheme (source: VisitEngland, *GTBS members research, 2009*; VisitEngland, *Industry Benchmark Survey, 2010*).
- The industry in England is not coordinated in its approach to climate change adaptation and while there are examples of good practice, this is not consistent with the public or third sector (not-for-profit-groups and charities). The awareness by both the public and business is increasing but evidence suggests that only 8.6% of businesses recognise climate change as a risk (source: AXA Insurance 2007, South West Tourism / Tourism South East Climate adaptation programmes).
- We live in a world with a limited amount of resources:
 - The global demand for energy is predominantly upward and most of these needs are met by coal, natural gas and oil. The cost of oil in particular is set to increase as a result of diminishing resources, which will push up the cost of energy, travel and impact through the supply chain.
 - There is increasing pressure on both the supply of clean water and the quality of bathing waters around the country.
 - There is increasing pressure on the ability to supply sufficient foods in this country without importing. Improving levels of local food production will help both the economy and reduce environmental impacts.
- The Government's economic recovery agenda gives tourism a major opportunity to capitalise on the principals of Wise Growth. There are examples around England of destinations that have harnessed local culture, landscape, business and heritage to unlock inspiration and fun to improve the overall visitor experience and resilience in the local economy.
- When destinations are developed and managed, as part of the wider economy and with Wise Growth principles embedded, they can thrive; creating better places to live that are also better places to work and visit. There are some very clear examples such as the New Forest and the Forest of Bowland where long term strategies are paying widespread dividends. Benefits include an improved visitor experience, increased investment, enhanced productivity, comprehensive support from residents and politicians; and a better managed environment all of which are enjoyed by a wide range of stakeholders.

- VisitEngland Research in 2010 found consumers are willing to play their part in local stewardship, if it is easy and simple to do so. For many, buying local produce and the opportunity to engage in the local culture, adds significant value to any visit. In contrast to this, research shows undertaking simple tasks, such as recycling or being less wasteful away from home, does not add to a richer visitor experience of a destination.
- Local produce is a significant opportunity to create a win-win situation when promoted. Producers and the local economy as a whole can benefit through increased demand and the additional jobs this brings. There is also the potential for reduced emissions through fewer food distribution miles and overall the consumption of local food contributes to an enhanced sense of place while also stimulating local community pride (source: VisitEngland, *Staycation Research*, 2010).
- Travel is a fundamental part of all tourism and depending on the mode used has a variety of impacts. By far the most popular mode in the domestic tourism is car travel (source: Department for National Transport, *National Travel Survey*, 2009) as it is the most flexible and perceived to be lower cost. Travel to and within a destination brings significant issues for visitors, the environment, residents and businesses alike with issues around congestion, parking and ever increasing fuel costs. There are many opportunities to improve the experience of a destination through innovative sustainable transport projects. Examples of current projects include the promotion of car free days, which are linked to walking and cycling itineraries and integrated into public transport provision. Forward thinking businesses are already designing their own incentives and car free programmes, working with destination managers to bring them to market. Examples include Exmoor More project in Exmoor, The New Forest Tour Bus and Barclay's London Bike scheme.
- There has already been considerable investment in the development of tools providing assistance for businesses to embrace Wise Growth practices. However, this has created over 100 different forms of assistance, which creates confusion and limits the success and purpose behind the investment. Green Start has therefore been developed by VisitEngland to become a portal for all sectors of tourism providing clarity on the help available in a more coherent and consistent approach.

The Action Plan

Wise Growth is not about developing specific types of tourism experiences. It is about embedding the principles throughout the entire tourism offer. All Action Groups within the Strategic Framework have been challenged to embrace Wise Growth and apply its principles in their Action Plans.

The Wise Growth approach to tourism will help achieve many of the objectives of the Action Plans by creating much greater levels of cooperation between businesses and destinations.

This could do much to ensure England remains competitive domestically and internationally by protecting and enhancing the quality of our destinations, improving products, efficiency and consequently the overall visitor experience.

Objective 1: Embed the principles of wise growth into all Action Plans associated with the Strategic Framework for Tourism.

ACTION	LEAD PARTNERS (where appropriate)	PARTNER SIGN UP	OUTCOME OR SUCCESS MEASURE
i. Embed Wise Growth principles into all action plans of the Strategic Framework.	VisitEngland	Destination Management Organisations (DMOs); Local Authorities (LAs); Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs); Trade Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wise Growth integrated into all Action Plans.
ii. Establish a Wise Growth Group to act as an advisory body for the on-going development and monitoring of the embedding of Wise Growth principles throughout the Strategic Framework.	New Forest	VisitEngland; ABTA; Responsible Tourism Partnership (RTP); Welcome to Yorkshire; Tourism Management Institute (TMI); British Destinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual review of all action plans. Improved consistency and understanding of Wise Growth arising from support of the Wise Growth Group.
iii. Develop the concept of the “economics of happiness” as a concise mechanism to explain Wise Growth in tourism and its benefits to visitors, environment, residents and business stakeholders. Link the principles of inspiration, passion and fun to the localism agenda to achieve success of the industry as a whole.	Wise Growth Group		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simple guidance on the benefits of Wise Growth to all stakeholders.
iv. Produce guidance on Wise Growth that can be used by strategic tourism planners to provide clarity on its meaning, adoption and implementation when developing tourism strategies and business plans.	Wise Growth Group	VisitEngland; Trade Associations; DMOs; LAs; LEPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A working model that will enable change and an embedded approach. Fewer ad-hoc sustainability initiatives that sit outside development plans.
v. Develop dynamic case studies of destinations to show how the adoption of Wise Growth principles can result in positive change and the meeting of strategic objectives. This will be scoped and monitored by the Wise Growth Group (established in action ii).	Wise Growth Group	New Forest; Visit Manchester; Plus two others to be decided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publication of case studies that will be monitored and refreshed over the life of the Action Plan. Report on effectiveness and results of taking a Wise Growth approach to destination management.

Objective 2: Embed the principles of Wise Growth into communication strategies with visitors and residents to enable them to cherish the places they visit, live and work.

ACTION	LEAD PARTNERS (where appropriate)	PARTNER SIGN UP	OUTCOME OR SUCCESS MEASURE
i. Develop a communications toolkit to help the wider adoption of Wise Growth principles.	Wise Growth Group	Certification schemes; The International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT), Trade Associations; DMOs; LAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater understanding by marketers that they can promote Wise Growth principles as part of a positive tourism experience – that it is both niche and mainstream. • Increased demand from consumers for destinations, experiences and products that are passionate, inspirational, fun and ‘Wise’. • Working guidance on engagement and communication between stakeholders and how the ‘environment’ is an integral part of any tourism strategies or business plans. • Greater engagement with residents by tourism organisations at a destination level. In doing so improving the consideration of residents’ interests in all tourism strategies or business plans.
ii. Maintain a process to endorse sustainable tourism certification schemes that provides clarity to business on which schemes are robust, confidence for consumers that products they purchase are genuinely ‘green’ and assurance for marketing partners that they will minimise ‘greenwash’.	ICRT	VisitEngland; Visit Wales; Northern Ireland Tourist Board; Fáilte Ireland; DMOs; Trade Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robust and credible certification programmes that provide improvement for businesses and clear guidance for consumers on “Wise” products.

Objective 3: Help tourism businesses engage in Wise Growth, by articulating the business case and providing access to tools and resources.

ACTION	LEAD PARTNERS (where appropriate)	PARTNER SIGN UP	OUTCOME OR SUCCESS MEASURE
i. Collate, interpret and build a consistent and coherent business case for private sector engagement in Wise Growth. This should include the collection of case studies coming out of action 1: V to illustrate the business case. Access to these case studies should be facilitated through existing platforms such as the Better Tourism (Green Start) platform.	VisitEngland	Certification schemes, DMOs; LAs; LEPS; Trade Associations; RTP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A consistent business case that can be used by those organisations who wish to encourage business uptake of sustainable principles. • An increase in activity on the peer-to-peer forum of Green Start. • Consistent language use to communicate the business case to businesses and with this an improved understanding of why action should be taken. VisitEngland’s ‘Industry Benchmark’ survey could be used as a measure of perception change and understanding.
ii. Further promote and disseminate Green Start as a one stop shop for Wise Growth and sustainability in business. This aims to more effectively disseminate the guidance and tools already developed rather than creating new solutions. To encourage greater engagement the local branding of this resource is to be more widely encouraged.		Certification bodies; Trade Associations; Tourism Professional Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider dissemination of information on sustainable development tools for SME’s and greater engagement and understanding from business. • Number of businesses completing action plans in Green Start. • An increase in the number of destinations adopting a branded Green Start site.
iii. Review and re-use existing information on climate change for business/ destination resilience and make available to a wider audience, through mechanisms such as Green Start or the Destination Management good practice resource.		UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP); VisitEngland; DMOs; LAs; LEPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in carbon emissions, lower energy consumption at a business level.
iv. Assess the effectiveness of local ambassador programmes to illustrate the value and benefits of a Wise Growth approach to influence behaviour change amongst businesses and then their visitors. Produce a model that can be adopted by other destinations to encourage Wise Growth.	CoaST	VisitEngland; English National Parks Authorities Association (ENPAA); DMOs; LAs; LEPS; Trade Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An evaluation study of the effectiveness of an ambassador programme and a model available for roll out to destinations keen to engage. • A change in behaviour that results in a ‘bottom up’ approach towards Wise Growth.

Objective 4: Measure, report and communicate the impacts of Wise Growth transparently.

ACTION	LEAD PARTNERS (where appropriate)	PARTNER SIGN UP	OUTCOME OR SUCCESS MEASURE
i. Develop a set of indicators on the impacts of tourism activity that relate to the interest of each of the stakeholder group identified (visitors, residents, business and the environment). These indicators should be flexible to be used nationally or locally and should be simple, meaningful and easy to collect and resonate with all policy makers and stakeholders.	Tourism Intelligence Unit (TIU)	English Tourism Intelligence Partnership (ETIP); Wise Growth Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree core and optional indicators to benchmark and measure performance at a local and national level. • Report on indicators on an annual basis linked to the review of this action plan.
ii. Evaluate the effectiveness of ‘foot printing’ tools in order to complete a life cycle analysis of different visitor types to and within England. This will lead to a greater understanding of the potential business case for holidaying at home to achieve carbon reduction targets.	TIU	Wise Growth Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater understanding of impacts of tourism from the supply and demand side to facilitate more focused development plans. • A substantiated business case that holidaying at home has a lower carbon foot print.
iii. Evaluate the feasibility of a ‘sustainable tourism observatory’ that brings together research in an open access platform, encouraging interpretation/ dissemination and reducing duplication of effort.	RTP	ICRT; UNIS; Responsible Hospitality Partnership; ABTA; VisitEngland; RTP; Tourism Professional Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A business case for the development of a ‘sustainable tourism observatory’. • Greater sharing of research that result in the reducing of duplication research.