



# Tourism in Herefordshire

**Meeting: Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee**

**Meeting date: Tuesday 17 February 2026**

**Report by: Director for Growth**

## Classification

Open

## Decision type

This is not an executive decision

## Wards affected

All Wards

## Purpose

The Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee would like to review the governance and delivery structures, impact in inclusivity of the Destination Management Plan, and future decisions and policy stance.

## Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee note the background information included in the report.**

## Alternative options

None – this is a background paper to inform the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee.

## Key considerations

1. Tourism plays a critical role in the Herefordshire economy. The visitor economy in Hereford was valued at £773m in 2024 and employs just under 8000 FTE people. The county's outstanding natural environment, heritage, culture and locally distinctive food and drink, provide the basis for a strong and growing visitor offer. Tourism also plays a key role in raising awareness of the county as a place to live, work, study and invest, highlighting the quality of life that Herefordshire has to offer.
2. Tourism marketing and development in Herefordshire is primarily led by [Herefordshire County Business Improvement District Ltd](#). A Business Improvement District (BID) is a business-led

partnership within a defined geographic area, in which designated local businesses pay an additional levy on top of their business rates to fund initiatives that enhance the local environment and economy. These initiatives provide services that go above and beyond those delivered by local authorities. Typical BID-funded projects include marketing and promotional activity, business support, regeneration and public realm improvements, and a range of environmental schemes.

3. In November 2021, a ballot was held with eligible tourism and independent retail businesses across Herefordshire, excluding Hereford City Centre, which is already subject to a separate BID. 124 businesses voted in the ballot and 103 of those businesses voted in favour of forming a countywide BID with a combined rateable value of £3,884,400. Eligible businesses now pay a 2% levy on business rates (collected by Herefordshire Council on behalf of the HCBID) to implement the five-year business plan. The current five-year term is due to end in December 2026, and the BID Board are preparing to hold a ballot for a further five-year term in the Autumn of 2026.
4. Herefordshire BID is also the lead partner for the Herefordshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership, recognised by Visit England (a government agency) as the lead point of contact for tourism engagement and national and international marketing activities.
5. Herefordshire Council do not have a dedicated tourism function. However because tourism is a key sector in the county's economic strategy, a range of council services contribute to the county's tourism offer such as Growth Hub business support and grants, public realm improvements, maintaining public rights of way, public transport, licensing, and the museums service.

## Herefordshire County BID

6. The Herefordshire County BID (HCBID) Board is a volunteer-led governing body made up of business leaders from across the county, representing a broad range of sectors and geographic areas. The Board provides strategic oversight, ensures strong governance, and guides the delivery of the HCBID Business Plan on behalf of levy-paying businesses. Board members work alongside the HCBID's core operational team, which includes the Chief Executive, Business Liaison Manager, Project Officer, and Marketing Manager, to oversee performance, monitor financial management and approve key decisions that support the county's visitor economy and business environment. The Board plays an active role in shaping marketing, destination development, business support initiatives, and long-term economic priorities for Herefordshire.
7. HCBID has continued to deliver strong, strategically aligned activity across the visitor economy. HCBID have seen accelerated growth in brand recognition both regionally and nationally through all of the marketing campaigns that have been delivered and internationally through the Herefordshire Film Office and Hamnet, launched new digital tools to showcase rural Herefordshire, and a strengthened programme of business support via SEEDL training and Place Support Partnerships business savings scheme.
8. Visit Herefordshire is managed and funded by HCBID, and the brand continues to play a central role in raising the profile of the County, driving visitor demand, and supporting the success of Levy Payer businesses. The Visit Herefordshire brand is a shared economic engine which, amplifies the County's story on a national stage, drives visitor behaviour, attracts new audiences, strengthens local business performance, and positions Herefordshire as one of England's most authentic, experience-rich rural destinations.
9. Achievements over the last 12 months include:
  - **Place Informatics Data and STEAM Report:** The **total economic impact rose to £773m** in 2024, an increase of 5.03% compared to 2023 with increases to 8.05m total visitor days and 3.05m overnight stays. Given the very challenging climate for tourism in 2024, including continued cost of living impacts and a wet summer, this represents an excellent result. By comparison, the national GB Tourism Survey results for West Midlands recorded a 14% fall in staying visits and a 10% fall in day visits, while rural destinations across England saw a 6% drop in staying visits and 18% decline in day visits.

- **Visit Herefordshire is a Strong, Credible and Recognised Destination Brand:** The Visit Herefordshire brand provides a unified voice for the county's tourism offer. Through consistent imagery, messaging and storytelling, the brand: positions Herefordshire as an authentic, rural, high-quality destination; showcases the County's food, drink, culture, landscapes, and experiences and helps visitors understand what makes Herefordshire distinctive. Consistent brand use across campaigns, PR, digital content, and national partnerships like VisitEngland builds trust and recognition which is vital in a competitive visitor market.
- **Herefordshire Film Office:** is a joint initiative between the HCBID and Herefordshire Council to attract film productions, support location scouting, and showcase the county as a high-quality filming destination. Working closely with industry partners inc. VisitEngland, Creative England and Filming in England to provide stunning locations, logistical support, and coordination for visiting productions. A major early success of the film office was securing filming for **Hamnet**. The launch has generated national and international attention, sparking what's been described as the "Hamnet Effect." This momentum has elevated Herefordshire's profile as a film-friendly destination, opened new economic and tourism opportunities, and inspired dedicated promotional activity to attract "set-jettlers" and cultural tourists
- **Launch of the Visit Herefordshire OutdoorActive Partnership (2026):** Launched this year giving visitors and residents access to:
  - a comprehensive digital mapping and route planning platform; walking; cycling, riding, and long-distance trail routes across Herefordshire;
  - seamless GPS enabled exploration through the Visit Herefordshire app; and
  - enhanced visibility for businesses connected to outdoor and nature-based tourism.

This launch significantly strengthens Herefordshire's appeal for active, adventure, and nature focused visitors. This area of tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism segments in the UK. The rollout of OutdoorActive will transform how visitors engage with our rural county. This powerful digital tool is expanding our reach to adventure-seeking audiences worldwide, providing rich mapping and route information, and encouraging deeper discovery of Herefordshire's rural assets.

- **Major National Media Coverage:** Herefordshire appeared in leading outlets, journalist / influencer visits and curated media opportunities strengthening awareness of the county's attractions and experiences through coordinated PR and digital activity. This collective promotion ensures levy payers benefit from high value visibility that would be prohibitively costly to achieve independently.
- **Growth of Seasonal Trails and Themed Activities:** Campaigns rolled out across all digital platforms, supporting year-round visitor interest to support footfall and overnight stays. Including Hamnet – Through Tudor Landscapes, Herefordshire Food Safari, and Dark Skies.
- **Engagement:** The Visit Herefordshire website and social media channels act as a powerful marketing engine for the county. Continued expansion following the strong performance of 2024, with improved engagement and richer storytelling aligned to LVEP themes: 385,000 users interact visit the website's annually; 135,000 listing interactions were recorded in 2025, 17m google searches returned Visit Herefordshire in 2025; high performing pages include the business directory, What's On, See & Do and itineraries. Social media results and user

engagement continue to grow year on year. These channels put levy payer businesses in front of high intent audiences looking for places to eat, stay, shop, and explore.

- **Visit Herefordshire Website developments:** Significant improvements in content; digital mapping integration including outdoor trails; points of interests; multilingual content; immersive features; What's On pages; directory listings; itineraries; newly developed themed content; structure, user engagement, website functionality leading to increased traffic and engagement.
- **Market Towns and Rural Grant Funds awarded:** Over the past 12 months grants have been awarded for the following projects: Late Night Shopping events in Ledbury, Ledbury, Bromyard, Kington and Visit Leominster website developments, Ledbury town map design & distribution ; Ross-on-Wye Christmas Light installations, Destination Bromyard quarterly magazines; Kington and Leominster advertising campaigns; Leominster antiques trail promotion, Herefordshire Pilgrim Way signage improvements; Herefordshire Trail map development and signage.
- **Herefordshire Cultural Partnership:** HCBID has partially funded the creation of a refreshed Herefordshire Cultural Strategy that is in line with the Herefordshire Destination Management Plan's 10-year strategy, ensuring the County's economic strategies align.
- **Visit Herefordshire Tourism Conference 2025:** brought together tourism businesses for a full day of industry insights, skills training, and networking. It featured presentations from VisitEngland, updates on the new Destination Management Plan, and practical breakout sessions. The event highlighted strategic opportunities for growth, collaboration, and improved visitor experiences to 150 Visitor economy Professionals in Herefordshire.
- **Visit Herefordshire Tourism Awards:** Celebrating excellence, with 84 outstanding tourism businesses shortlisted for their innovation and quality. One of Herefordshire's largest industry events, the awards recognised top performers across 16 categories, with winners progressing to the national Awards. In 2025 Herefordshire secured one silver and two bronze awards at the VisitEngland *Awards for Excellence*. The ceremony strengthens pride in the sector and showcases Herefordshire nationally.
- **Learning Hub:** Ongoing access to SEEDL's free skills development, with strong participation across customer service, digital skills, leadership and compliance. In 2025, 1437 Live Courses and 762 On Demand Courses were completed. *Get Fully Booked:* Developed and launched 11 new marketing training courses in partnership with *Get Fully Booked* to support Herefordshire tourism businesses.
- **Place Support Partnership:** providing free cost saving advice and guidance and has now identified over £352,000 worth of cost savings for tourism businesses.
- **Increased Business Engagement:** regular market town drop ins; workshops and specialist support sessions have been delivered leading to stronger, more frequent two-way communication with levy payers
- **Showcasing the county at key events:** Raising Herefordshire's profile at high-footfall consumer shows, aligning with target audiences.

- Continued LVEP programme delivery, partnerships, and improvements in destination coordination
  - Further development of Herefordshire Film Office , building on the “Hamnet Effect”
  - Expansion of the outdoor active platform with additional routes, mapping content, and business integration
  - Development of dedicated weddings and conference campaigns on the Visit Herefordshire website to market these sectors and attract new audiences
  - Preparation for the 2026 HCBID ballot, including: comprehensive business engagement, consultation on priorities for the next five-year term; development of the new business plan to shape the future of HCBID and our visitor economy
11. With the launch of the Visit Herefordshire LVEP Destination Management Plan (DMP) in April 2025, HCBID has focussed projects and investments on long-term growth outcomes, improving the visitor experience and creating tangible value for our levy payers. The year has brought new initiatives, major product launches, and significant milestones that reflect our ongoing commitment to raising the profile of Herefordshire as an outstanding rural destination.
12. The Visit Herefordshire Destination Management Plan (DMP) (2025–2035) was developed as a core requirement of achieving LVEP status and as a long-term strategic framework for growing and managing the county’s Visitor economy. Its creation was shaped by national expectations set by VisitEngland/VisitBritain and by local priorities identified through HCBID / Herefordshire Council leadership, business engagement, and partnership working.
13. There are several drivers for the plan being developed.
- LVEP accreditation requirements: As part of the national LVEP programme, destinations must demonstrate strong governance, clear strategic direction, and integrated planning through a formal DMP
  - Need for long-term, countywide coordination: The DMP provides a shared 10-year roadmap covering marketing, product development, infrastructure, skills, data, sustainability, and business engagement. It brings public and private partners together around one strategy
  - Stronger alignment with national visitor economy priorities: The DMP connects Herefordshire’s ambitions with emerging England-wide strategies, VisitEngland guidance, and national brand positioning
  - Extensive business and stakeholder consultation: Consultation involved workshops, business interviews, engagement sessions, and cross-border discussions (e.g., with Shropshire, Worcestershire, Cheshire and Welsh borders) to ensure the plan meets sector needs and regional opportunities
  - Development of a shared long-term vision: The plan sets a common destination vision for 2025–2035, outlining how Herefordshire will grow as a sustainable, distinctive rural destination with strong national visibility
  - Creation of a detailed action plan and marketing strategy
  - Oversight by the LVEP Advisory Board: The Advisory Board provides leadership, scrutinises delivery, and ensures the DMP aligns with countywide economic growth priorities
14. In Summary, the Destination Management Plan was developed to provide a strong, evidence-based, collaborative and nationally aligned framework for the next decade. It positions Herefordshire for growth, supports levy paying businesses, strengthens its brand, and connects the county to national strategies, funding and partnerships.
15. LVEP: A major strategic benefit for levy payers, delivering improved countywide coordination, destination data use, and strategic focus across marketing, product development, and business engagement. The strength of the Visit Herefordshire brand contributed directly to the County achieving (LVEP) status, a nationally recognised accreditation that: unlocks access to VisitEngland

toolkits, training and development; enhances potential for future government funding; brings expert regional development support directly into the county and increases Herefordshire's standing within England's Visitor economy network.

16. Launch of Herefordshire Destination Management Plan (April 2025) in conjunction with Herefordshire Council and VisitEngland: Delivered a clear, LVEP-aligned strategic roadmap for the development of Herefordshire's Visitor economy over the next 10 years, providing long-term direction across marketing, product development, infrastructure and business engagement, and targets our primary markets of "active explorers", "cultural explorers", and "curious families".
17. LVEP status was pursued to:
  - To elevate Herefordshire's national profile and gain recognition as a high-performing destination
  - To secure access to VisitEngland toolkits, expertise, training, marketing support, and major national initiatives that were not previously available
  - To enable better data use, countywide coordination, and strategic leadership of the Visitor economy
  - To improve eligibility for significant national grant funding and strengthen bids for large-scale projects
18. The core aims of the LVEP are to:
  - Boosting Herefordshire's profile as a top rural visitor destination
  - Growing the visitor economy to over £1 billion by 2035
  - Delivering the Destination Management Plan to coordinate long-term development
  - Increasing visitors, overnight stays, and spend through quality, sustainability, accessibility and local pride
  - Strengthening business support, skills development, and commercial opportunities for levy payers
  - Using data effectively to track trends, measure impact, and guide interventions

## Community impact

19. The visitor economy and independent retail are key local sectors both in terms of direct employment, as well as creating and promoting a high-quality place for people to live, work, study and invest. The total economic impact rose to £773m in 2024, an increase of 5.03% compared to 2023 with increases to 8.05m total visitor days and 3.05m overnight stays. Given the very challenging climate for tourism in 2024, including continued cost of living impacts and a wet summer, this represents an excellent result. By comparison, the national GB Tourism Survey results for West Midlands recorded a 14% fall in staying visits and a 10% fall in day visits, while rural destinations across England saw a 6% drop in staying visits and 18% decline in day visits.
20. The Council's County Plan 2024 to 2028 states that 'Herefordshire has a rich cultural heritage and boasts a varied environment. Who we are, our sense of place, and our landscape, villages, high streets, town centres and rural areas are all deeply intertwined'. The County Plan also states that 'We are committed to working alongside partner organisations to grow the tourism economy'.
21. The continuation of HCBID will contribute to the council's Corporate Delivery Plan 2025/2026 Objective 'Work with our partners and businesses to facilitate growth across the county' through the following Key Deliverables: Support County Business Improvement District (BID)/Visit Herefordshire to increase the economic impact of tourism across the county to achieve the following milestones:
  - Support the establishment of the Local Visitor Economy Partnership
  - Support the partnership to develop the Herefordshire Destination Management Plan
22. Herefordshire's 2050 Economic Plan commits to: 'Promote the county through a place marketing strategy, building on our strong visitor economy offer and the work of the Hereford Business Improvement District (BID) and Herefordshire County BID' and 'Develop a cohesive tourism offer

across our city, network of towns, villages and rural areas, building on our Market Town Investment Plans’.

## Environmental impact

23. HCBID/ Visit Herefordshire are strengthening the county’s commitment to environmental responsibility and green tourism by embedding sustainability throughout the Destination Management Plan and wider tourism activity. The work promotes regenerative tourism principles, encouraging businesses to adopt practices that enhance local ecosystems, communities, and cultural landscapes. This includes developing nature-based trails, improving access to outdoor recreation, and publishing immersive digital content that supports responsible exploration of Herefordshire’s countryside.
24. National media features, such as coverage in Green Traveller Magazine, National Geographic and the Guardian further highlight the county’s growing reputation for environmentally conscious travel. In addition, Visit Herefordshire proudly runs the Regenerative Tourism category within the Visit Herefordshire Tourism Awards, directly linked to the VisitEngland Awards for Excellence, helping to recognise, celebrate, and elevate businesses leading the way in sustainable and regenerative tourism.

## Equality duty

25. As this is a background paper for Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee and not a council decision, a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required. However, the following equality considerations should be taken into account when making a decision about this activity:
  - a. Visit Herefordshire has a dedicated Accessibility page on its website
  - b. HCBID lists walks without stiles and publishes maps with walks that can accommodate electric mobility vehicles
  - c. Visit Herefordshire also has information and links to Blue Badge Parking Information, Public and Accessible Toilet Facilities and Shopmobility
  - d. The HCBID Board and Operational Team have drop-in clinics all over the county, including rural areas, to ensure they are accessible to all members
  - e. The HCBID is continually striving to make their services more inclusive and have a statement on their website that reads *‘We want this guide to Herefordshire to welcome all, be accessible and provide clear access information. It is a work in progress, and we welcome feedback and additional information which could be featured here’*

## Resource implications

21. Herefordshire council pay an annual levy payment to the BID of £13,795 per annum, as the car parks held by the council are liable for the business rate levy.
22. The HCBID have also successfully applied in previous years for £125,000 of UK Shared Prosperity Funding administered by the council.
23. There are no further revenue implications for the council.

## Legal implications

24. The relevant legal provisions for this decision can be found in the council’s constitution, [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/constitution](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/constitution).

## Risk management

As mentioned in paragraph 1. Herefordshire Council does not have a dedicated tourism function and should HCBID not be successful if its next ballot there will be a significant gap in tourism provision in the county.

<u>Risk / opportunity</u>	<u>Mitigation</u>
<p><b>Risk</b> The HCBID ballot is unsuccessful, resulting in a gap in service delivery, countywide promotion and support for the tourism sector.</p>	<p>Should the HCBID ballot be unsuccessful, there is no alternative option available which would generate the equivalent level of funding required to support the breadth and scope of the projects being delivered by the HCBID to enhance the county's overall tourism offer.</p> <p>The HCBID Board will actively consult with the HCBID businesses to ensure they are committed and supportive of the projects within the proposed Business Plan. By deciding to vote 'Yes' in the next ballot, the council is demonstrating its support for the BID proposals and</p>
<p><b>Risk</b> BID is formed but fails to deliver the Business Plan</p>	<p>If the HCBID ballot is successful, it will be managed by the HCBID Company (which already exists and is nearing its first term). The council has a director appointment on the Board. The council also has the right to veto under Regulation 12 of the BID regulations.</p>
<p><b>Opportunity</b> £1bn tourism economy by 2035</p>	<p>The HCBID has the ability to attract income from levy paying businesses, however, through the LVEP, Visit Herefordshire and DMP work, there is the potential to increase the tourism economy in Herefordshire up to £1bn by 2035.</p>

### Consultees

Herefordshire County BID have jointly developed the paper for CCSC and will attend the meeting.

### Appendices

Herefordshire Destination Management Plan.

### Background papers

None

### Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report