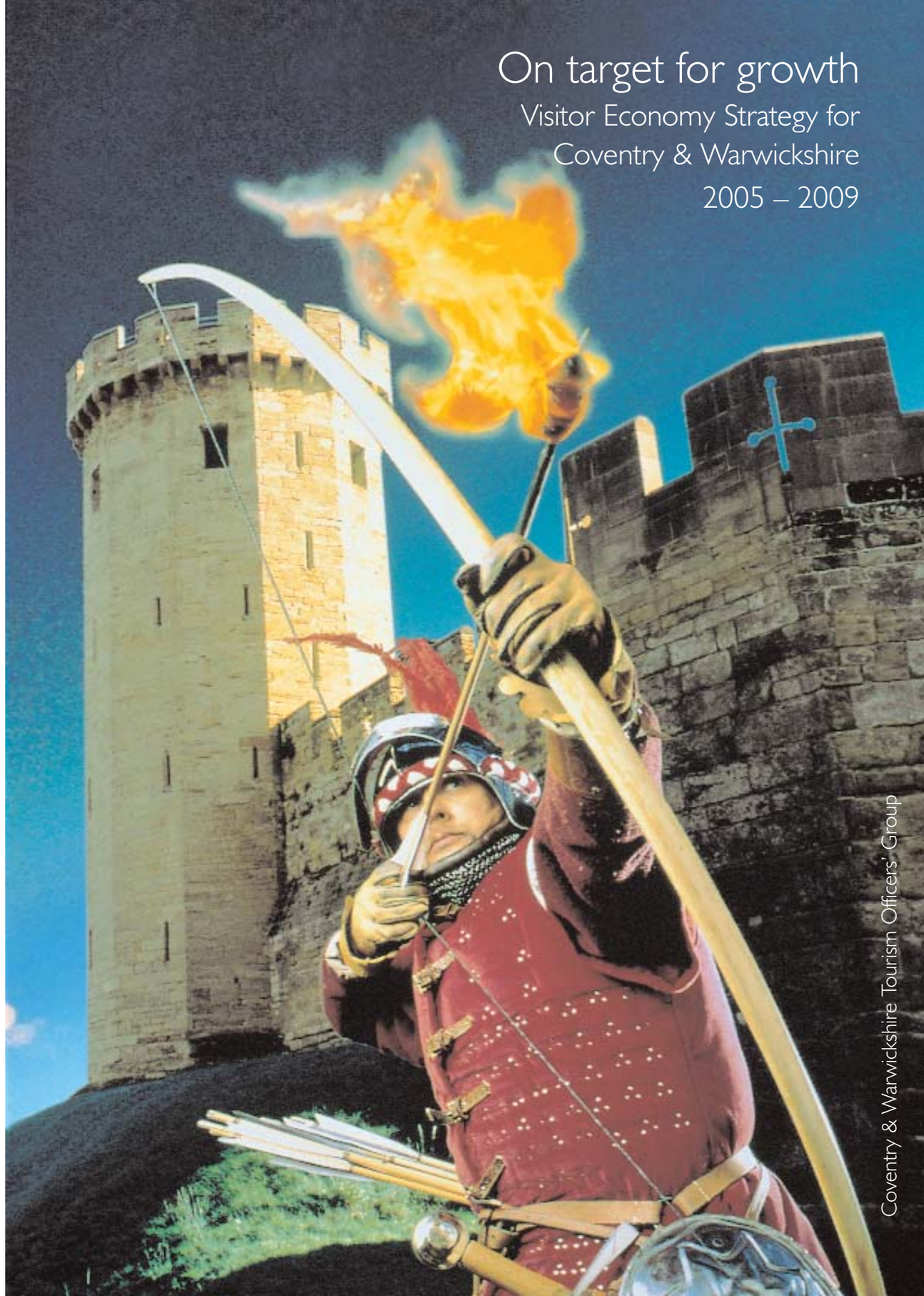

On target for growth

Visitor Economy Strategy for Coventry & Warwickshire 2005 – 2009

Coventry & Warwickshire Tourism Officers' Group

Published by Warwickshire County Council on behalf of Coventry & Warwickshire Tourism Officers' Group
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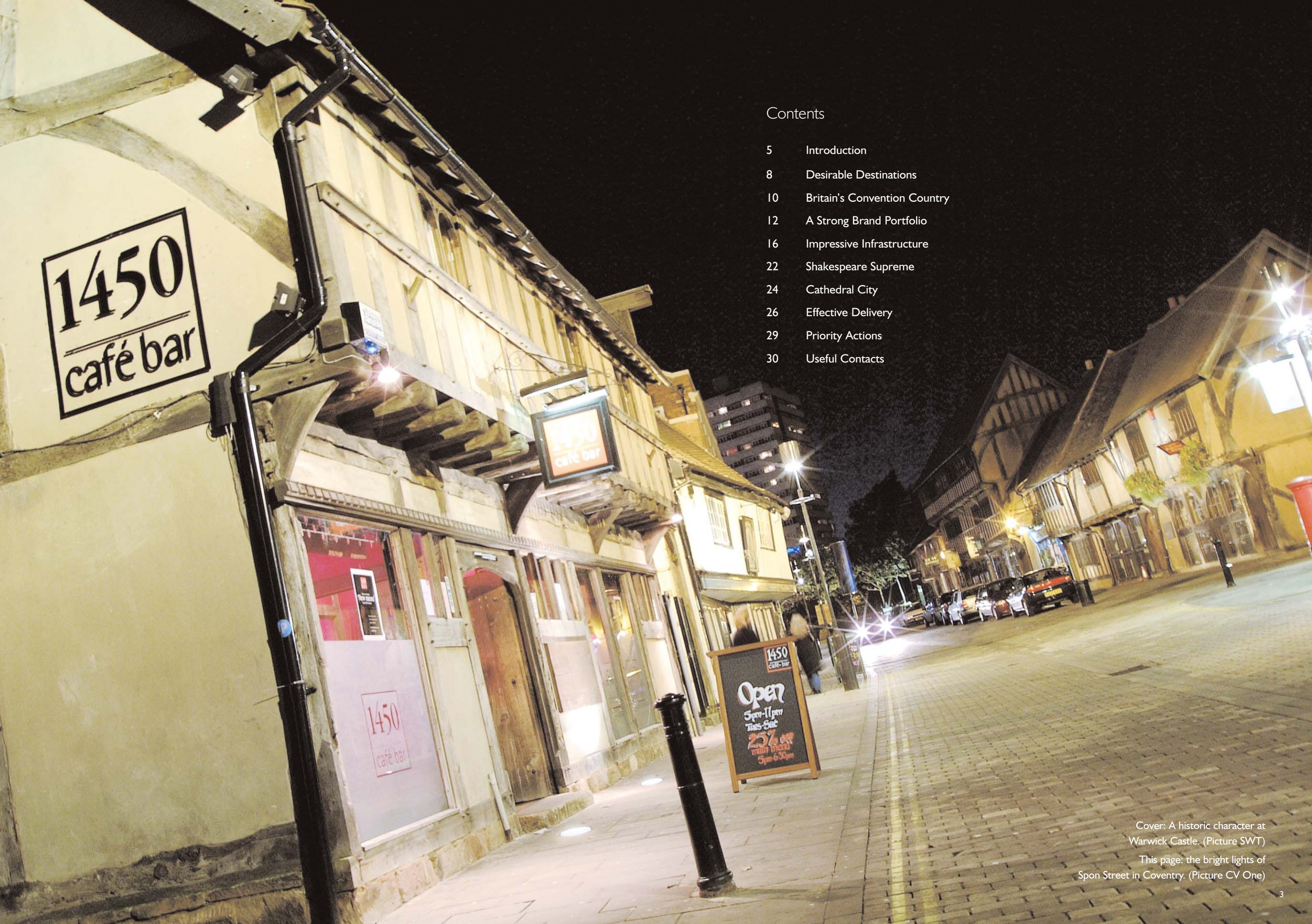

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Cover: A historic character at Warwick Castle. (Picture SWT)

This page: the bright lights of Spon Street in Coventry. (Picture CV One)

Summary of Strategic Priorities

Destination Health Check:

- Work with Heart of England Tourism to establish the procedure for destination health checks, and then pilot these in the sub-region starting with Stratford which is an international cultural icon.

Britain's Conference Country:

- Open discussions with Marketing Birmingham and the NEC Group about the development of a brand based on the idea of Britain's Conference Country and what the implications are.

A Strong Brand Portfolio:

- Start discussions about thematic campaigns that might be developed under a Warwickshire brand and how they might be organised.

Impressive Infrastructure:

- Develop Stratford's TIC to be a regional flagship fulfilling its role as a gateway to the region.
- Take a partnership approach to the development of a Destination Management System (DMS) for the sub-region.
- Work with the LSC, Heart of England Tourism and the Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support to define how business support and skill development will be delivered.

Effective Delivery:

- Support the Visitor Economy Forum to develop a strategic approach to tourism infrastructure
- Investigate how the whole sub-region can engage with DMPs.
- Join up marketing and promotion activities of organisations managing town centres and visitor destinations.
- Establish an evening strategy in one location acting as a model for others to follow.
- Commission reliable and consistent research and data across the sub-region to monitor the health of the visitor economy and the effectiveness of the strategy

1 Introduction

This strategy for developing the visitor economy in Coventry and Warwickshire is based on work by Locum Destination Consulting for the Coventry and Warwickshire Tourism Officers Group. It is a response to changes to the support structures for the Visitor Economy and to the West Midlands Regional Economy Strategy produced by Advantage West Midlands, the Regional Development Agency. The strategy has been adopted by the local authorities across Coventry and Warwickshire.

1.1 Each part of the Coventry and Warwickshire sub-region already has a tourism strategy. Those strategies are recent, have been carefully prepared and are competent in identifying local issues and providing local guidance. This sub-regional strategy complements them and concentrates on the big picture – issues that are important within the context of the West Midlands region and England as a whole. It slots into the Regional Visitor Economy Strategy.

1.2 The sub-regional strategy is positioned as a Visitor Economy Strategy rather than a Tourism Strategy. This is recognition of the fact that tourism is as much about attracting people who live comparatively locally as it is about attracting people from far distances.

The strategy recognises the size and significance of this sector. It aims to direct public sector support to areas with the greatest need and/or growth potential.

1.3 Changing Market Conditions

There are important drivers of change affecting the environment in which tourism operates. Some are predictable. Others are not. They include:

- Ageing population.
- The value of sterling.
- Interest rates.
- The Licensing Act.
- Gambling reform.
- International crises.
- Growth of the Internet and other new technologies.
- Increasing competition from other means of spending leisure time.
- Demand for 'value for time'.

Facing page: Taking a break in the shadow of Coventry Cathedral. (Picture CV One)
Right: Polesworth Abbey. (Picture NWBC)

Table 1: Some Key Trends

Table 1 summarises the main trends that are likely to impact on tourism in the sub-region in coming years:

Travel Behaviour

Going Up

- Long holidays taken abroad
- Air travel via budget airliner
- Short breaks
- 'Long' short breaks (4-5 nights)
- Multiple holidays
- Visits to non-traditional attractions like factory outlets
- Visits to cities
- Ease of travel, especially by air
- Visits to friends & relatives - especially by the young
- Youth travel
- Congestion, and the desire to avoid it
- Business tourism

Going Down

- Long holidays taken in the UK
- Visits from overseas
- Visits to traditional visitor attractions

Product

Going Up

- Cities
- Self-catering for long holidays
- Self-contained holiday villages
- Character cottages
- Attractive rural destinations
- The Internet
- Branded sectors
- High quality independent providers
- Waterfront destinations
- Retail destinations
- Individual experiences & niche products

Going Down

- Traditional resorts
- Hotels & B&Bs for long holidays
- Mid and low market independent accommodation

Socio-demographic

Going Up

- Discretionary income
- ABC1s
- Households without children
- Single person households & single person travellers
- Upper and middle age groups
- Active 'empty nesters' and 'silver surfers'
- Young people in higher education

Going Down

- Leisure time
- Younger age groups
- C2DE socio economic groups

This page: Kenilworth Castle. (Picture SWT)
Facing page: Rugby town centre. (Picture RBC)

1.4 Delivering the strategy

The Coventry & Warwickshire Tourism Officers Group has developed an action plan to take forward this strategy. Its success will depend on working with partners in both the private and public sector. This joint working is a central theme of the Regional Visitor Economy Strategy which advocates the establishment of sub-regional Destination Management Partnerships (DMPs). These are explained in more detail in section 8, but in essence, DMPs should replace most of the marketing and membership functions of the former Visit Heart of England Tourist Board and additionally they should integrate with destination management – delivering an all-round excellent visitor experience.

In our sub-region CVOne already acts as a DMP for Coventry city centre, and South Warwickshire Tourism (Shakespeare Country) is a best practice example in destination marketing and visitor services. In many ways the Regional Visitor Economy Strategy is bringing other parts into line with the Coventry and Warwickshire situation. There are, however, a number of matters which are common across the sub-region and on which more joint working would be beneficial such as skills and training, transport infrastructure. A sub-regional Visitor Economy Forum is being established under the auspices of Coventry , Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership Ltd, the economic development partnership for the area. The Forum, consisting of both private and public sector representatives, will raise the profile of the importance of this sector to the overall economy and will address the common infrastructure issues impacting on the sector.

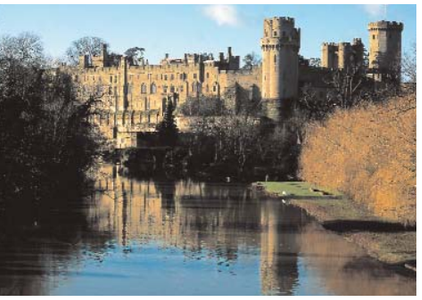
Main Elements of the Strategy

This Strategy is structured as 7 strands:

- Desirable Destinations – how the urban areas in the sub region can make themselves more attractive as destinations.
- Britain's Convention Country – developing and promoting the foremost area in the country for conferences and exhibitions.
- A Strong Brand Portfolio – clarity in the brands that will be promoted.
- Impressive Infrastructure – providing a top quality experience for visitors.
- Shakespeare Supreme – enhancing one of Britain's icon destination brands.
- Cathedral City – making Coventry an attractive city destination.
- Effective Delivery – implementing efficient and effective means for developing and promoting tourism, in line with changes at Regional level.

The ideas that are at the heart of this strategy are:

- Creation of a process of carrying out Destination Health Checks and preparing Evening Strategies for all the urban centres.
- Primary focus on Shakespeare Country and Coventry as the two main brands in the leisure portfolio, and additional emphasis on Warwickshire as a vehicle for promotion, especially of the "peripheral" parts of the county.
- Investment in Stratford-upon-Avon with the intention of developing one of the world's highest rated cultural destinations
- Making and promoting Coventry as a Cathedral City with the range of qualities that the description implies.
- Integration of town centre management with tourism management.
- Further strengthening the two primary destination management partnerships - CVOne and South Warwickshire Tourism – and developing strong destination management arrangements for the remainder of Warwickshire too.
- Development and promotion of one of Europe's leading areas for business tourism in the triangle formed by Birmingham, Coventry and Stratford-upon-Avon. Development of an integrated and balanced set of facilities to support this objective. To be promoted as Britain's Convention Country (or something similar).



Above: a view of Warwick Castle. (Picture SWT)

Below right: Racing at Stratford-upon-Avon. (Picture SWT)

2 Desirable Destinations

2.1 Great Places to Live, Work and Visit

One of the main objectives of this strategy is to improve the quality of all the urban centres in Coventry and Warwickshire. Attractive built environments, good shops, a variety of good quality places to eat and drink, and a vital cultural offer will make them more attractive to visitors, whether they live nearby or whether they live far away.

They should provide gateways and links to the surrounding countryside, and should provide markets for local produce. They should emphasise distinctiveness and authenticity.

2.2 Destination Health Check

The Coventry and Warwickshire Sub Region is keen to pilot the Destination Health Check programme in the Regional Visitor Economy Strategy. The objective is to ensure that the visitor experience is exceptional.

Working with Heart of England Tourism, the Regional Tourism Agency, the sub-region will co-ordinate the health checks, collecting and disseminating best practice.

Strategy

- Carry out selected destination health checks in the priority communities and rural areas of Coventry and Warwickshire and ensure that improvements result from them.

2.3 Working in Partnership

Partnership working is essential to the delivery of this strategy. Major stakeholders will include planners, town centre managers, tourism operators, tourist officers and business representatives from leisure and retail sectors. They will build on existing work in their areas including town centre partnerships or master planning exercises.

2.4 Integrating Town Centre Management with Destination Management

This strategy recognises that a main priority is to improve the overall quality and marketing of the town centres and there is, consequently, a need to move towards integration of tourism management and town centre management.

CVOne has been a pioneer nationwide in combining tourism management and city centre management, which can in turn provide a model of good practice for application across the sub region.

2.5 Evening Enhancement

The Regional Strategy recognises the importance of the night economy to the visitor economy. The evening and night economies of towns and cities have developed at a rapid rate, and are an important and underestimated part of the visitor economy.

The aim must be to ensure that the urban centres in Coventry and Warwickshire should be attractive to a broad range of the population, not just to the young, in the evening and to achieve a more "continental" approach where the city/town is vibrant at night, attracting a diverse audience. This would include the development of an evening 'café' culture that includes street and indoor events, arts and entertainment.

The new Licensing Act offers opportunities for towns and cities to offer a more mature and civilised night offer; the challenge is to avoid increase in the anti-social behaviour that is currently characteristic of the night economy in many towns and cities in Britain.

Strategy

- Closer integration of town centre management with tourism development
- Develop evening strategies for the sub region's towns and cities, starting with the Business Improvement Districts of Coventry and Rugby.

Pictures: Business tourism is an increasingly important sector for Coventry and Warwickshire.

3 Britain's Convention Country

3.1 The Importance of Business Tourism

The strategy acknowledges the critical importance of business tourism in the sub-region. It is also a priority in the Regional Visitor Economy Strategy. The sub-region has great competitive strength because of its location and the quality and quantity of the product it offers. There is substantial investment in the pipeline.

Independent business tourism is difficult to influence, but the development and promotion of the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) product is at the core of the strategy.

3.2 The Country's Foremost Convention Area

Birmingham and the National Exhibition Centre, which adjoins the Coventry and Warwickshire area, is, after London, the foremost area in the country for MICE tourism.

The influence of the National Exhibition Centre spreads throughout the sub-region, providing business for hotels, attractions and other local businesses. Warwickshire towns such as Coleshill and the centre of Coventry are nearer to the NEC than is the centre of Birmingham.

There is a substantial hotel and conference infrastructure in Coventry and Warwickshire, including famous venues and facilities such as the Belfry, the Forest of Arden Hotel and Warwick University.

The product is enhanced by the major conference and exhibition facilities of the new Ricoh Arena which includes a major casino and other leisure facilities.

Stoneleigh Park is already the foremost venue for agricultural shows and plans are underway for major enhancement of its facilities to appeal to the leisure market as well as expanding the current conference and exhibition offer.

The sub region has the added advantage of the iconic international destination, Stratford-upon-Avon. It has great potential in the international conference market, and as a reason for conferences to come to the region.

World renowned support facilities such as Warwick Castle, a top class venue for the formal dinners that normally accompany conferences and the Belfry's golf courses add to the attractiveness of the mix.

Strategy

- Work with key stakeholders such as Birmingham, Solihull and the NEC Group to develop and promote the concept of Britain's Convention Country (or something similar).
- Apply the Destination Health Check process to the Triangle[1].
- Focus convention bureau functions in one delivery body for the sub-region, closely linked to Birmingham and the NEC and able to draw on this relationship for major event-bidding tasks.
- Especially when marketing overseas, integrate conference-marketing operations across Britain's Convention Country to avoid internal competition and create a "one stop shop" for conference buyers.
- Develop a plan for filling missing pieces of the product jigsaw, including small and unusual venues, and infrastructure.
- Assess capacity and product development that would be required for Stratford-upon-Avon to be competitive in attracting international association conferences.
- Develop high-quality packages for conference organisers sold and supported by the DMPs.
- Establish a conference ambassadors programme, especially aimed at encouraging academics to persuade their professional associations to bring their conferences to the area.
- Actively participate in the West Midlands Business Visitor Economy Group.
- Improve the range and quality of information available about the area and its facilities.

1. See section 2.2

Above: George Eliot is an important cultural icon for Nuneaton and Bedworth. (Picture NBBC)

Opposite: The playing fields of Rugby School. (Picture RBC)

4 A Strong Brand Portfolio

The Coventry & Warwickshire sub-region is large and diverse, and therefore, it will be necessary to have marketing plans for the specific destination brands and products which each address relevant segments of the tourism market.

4.1 Refined Market Segmentation

The key target market segments include:

- UK short breaks;
- Overseas visitors, particularly from North America, Europe and the Far East;
- Meetings, conferences, incentive travel and exhibitions including both residential and non-residential trips;
- Local communities, including schools, within the sub-region;
- People living within about 60 minutes drive of destinations within the county, who are potential day visitors for shopping, entertainment, spectator sports, other organised events and to visit specific attractions;
- Coach and group travel from overseas tours passing through, short breaks and day trips;
- Hire boat traffic and boat owners visiting and passing through on the river and canal network;
- Niche markets based on special interests such as literary heritage.
- Visits to friends and relatives - including functions and weddings, and visits to students attending higher education institutions.
- Independent business related travel (as opposed to conference and exhibition organisers).

Strategy

- Develop market segmentation plans for each of the main destination brands in the region.
- Work in partnership to develop segmentation plans relating to the sub-regional themes.
- Each market segment plan will identify product fit, product development needs, in-depth market profiles, promotions, packages, relevant partners, resources and responsibilities.
- For leisure markets, take account of the emerging segmentation work from Visit Britain. This is establishing the concepts of "Experience Seekers", "Fun Seekers", "Delivery Seekers" and "Safety Seekers"

4.2 Two Main Brands for the Leisure Market

These must be Shakespeare Country (which applies to South Warwickshire) and Coventry.

Strategy

- Continue to focus on Shakespeare Country and Coventry as the two primary brands for leisure tourism.

4.3 More Emphasis on Warwickshire

Research has shown that "Warwickshire" is itself a strong brand associated positively with "leafy heart of England". It can be used especially for short break domestic tourists and in providing information to visitors once they are in the county.

It is also the most suitable brand for cross promoting different parts of the county and for promoting themes that apply across the county. It can be helpful in assisting rural regeneration and the northern part of the county.

Strategy

- Develop promotional activity, probably led by one of the partners on behalf of the others, that develops the Warwickshire brand, especially as a means of promoting destinations that are not otherwise well covered in promotional marketing.

4.4 Britain's Convention Country

As discussed in section 3, the development and marketing of the conference and exhibition offer is a priority for this strategy.

Strategy

- Seek partnership with Marketing Birmingham, the NEC and other stakeholders to develop branding for "Britain's Convention Country" (or a similar identity).

4.5 The "Best of England" Triangle

A triangle formed by Windsor, Bath and Stratford contains many of the "icon" destinations for overseas visitors, including, in addition to the three points of the triangle, Oxford, the Cotswolds and, slightly to the south, Stonehenge.

In targeting overseas visitors, working with the other "must see" destinations within this triangle is logical.

Strategy

- Develop joint marketing aimed at the overseas market in partnership with other destinations in the "Best of England" Triangle.
- South Warwickshire Tourism will take the lead in establishing this network.

4.6 Promoting Themes

Thematic marketing will be the focus of marketing at sub-regional level, especially under the Warwickshire brand. This also fits with the approach of the Regional Visitor Economy Strategy and its five themes.

There are many particularly strong themes in the Coventry and Warwickshire sub-region, such as:

- Literary Heritage – William Shakespeare, George Eliot and Rupert Brooke.
- Culture – Stratford, Warwick Arts Festival, University of Warwick's Art Centre, investment at Compton Verney in arts & culture facilities.
- Inland Waterways – River Avon, Avon Ring, Warwickshire Ring and the canal network visitor nodes such as Lapworth and Hatton Locks.
- Peace and Reconciliation – Coventry, multi-faith tourism, country churches, festivals.
- Performance Venues and Events – Various market segments according to the nature of the performance / event – RSC, Coventry Arena, Stoneleigh, music and arts festivals and cultural events.
- National Trust and Countryside – National Trust properties, Stoneleigh, Country Parks, other rural attractions and activities such as walking, cycling and other outdoor pursuits, sport and heritage and cultural themes.
- Motoring – Past and Present. The motor heritage theme, including motorsport, has great potential on a county wide basis, building on the strong product in Coventry, North Warwickshire and the Motorsports in the Midlands initiative.

Other products or themes require more development on the ground. There may be potential for:

- Sports tourism – Rugby Football, given the triumph of England in the World Cup, the proposed rugby football attraction in Rugby, as well as new football and rugby stadiums in Coventry. Golf is also a strong presence, particularly in the North of the region, with the Belfry the HQ of the European PGA.
- Health and Well-Being – organic gardening (developing on the presence of Ryton Organic Gardens), spa treatment, alternative therapies/remedies
- Gambling – Coventry Arena
- Learning – Rugby School, University of Warwick, Coventry University
- Warwickshire Worthies – to include inventors, famous sons and daughters.

Strategy

- Develop niche tactical campaigns – like literary heritage, heritage, gardens, motoring, waterways – mainly under the Warwickshire brand. Use these to support the "attract & disperse concept" of using the well-known locations to attract visitors and once here persuading them to visit less well known destinations.
- Work with other DMPs across the region to develop the themes highlighted in the Regional Visitor Economy Strategy.

Facing page: Chesterton Windmill overlooks a Warwickshire sunset. (Picture SWT)

Above: Coventry and Warwickshire benefits from an extensive canal network.

Facing page: attractions around Rugby town centre. (picture RBC)

5 Impressive Infrastructure

5.1 Obsessed with Quality

To keep pace with competitors, tourism in Coventry and Warwickshire must keep increasing the quality of the offer and focusing help on those operators who aspire to that. The main objective is to make sure that operators know where to access advice and what they can get. High quality does not necessarily mean luxury; it means meeting or exceeding visitor expectations and value for money.

The quality of the public sector infrastructure is key to ensuring that visitors enjoy their visits to any tourist destination. Continuing investment in the public realm has to be a priority and all stakeholders need to be encouraged to recognise the importance of taking account of the needs of visitors in their plans and the way they deliver services. These include public transport, stations and other gateways, sign-posting, information and maintenance of public places and amenities.

There is also a vital need to address human resource issues. Talented individuals are not choosing to make a career in tourism, and operators are often suspicious of the quality of the output of colleges and universities.

In the honeypot areas like Stratford there is much competition for labour, making recruitment difficult into this perceived lower-paid sector. During the peak season the problem is exacerbated leading to reliance on student and migrant workers. Retention is possibly a bigger issue than recruitment. High staff-turnover is expensive and makes it difficult to maintain high standards. Employers need skills to meet the non-remunerative needs of their employees.

The range and quality of employment in the industry is often underestimated. Some 85% of recruits to the Youth Hostels Association are graduates. Young pub managers can earn very good salaries and run their own businesses, working for dynamic pub companies. Contract food service providers offer structured career routes for both graduates and non-graduates.

The Regional Tourism & Leisure Skills Group is developing the "Quality at Heart Customer Service Excellence Accreditation Scheme". Advantage West Midlands is working on a Workforce Development Strategy to address the issues. The Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support is a key partner in the development and delivery of both of these. Springboard UK has recently developed a Code of Practice for work experience.

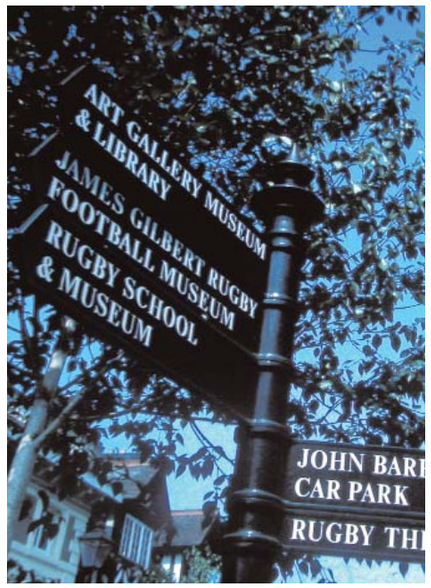
The new Regional Tourism Agency, Heart of England Tourism, will also be a key partner for business support, DMS development, and visitor information provision and research functions.

The primary role for tourism managers in Coventry and Warwickshire will be to establish stronger relationships with individual operators, making them aware of services that are available from the Regional Centre and encouraging their use of them. The aim is that local tourism officers will see themselves as "account managers".

Sub regional Destination Management Partnerships will seek the pursuit of excellence by providing inspiration as to what is possible. This might be, for example, through seeking funding for schemes to provide world class designers for accommodation providers in return for them acting as a "showcase" to others.

Strategy

- Work with the Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support in achieving a high take up of business support and to develop the "account manager" principle.
- Establish strong relationships between the Destination Management Partnership, Destination Marketing Organisations and the Regional Tourism Agency, with a clear definition of respective roles.
- Establish schemes for "motivating by inspiration".
- Ensure access to the Welcome to Excellence suite of training courses: Welcome Host, Welcome Host Plus, Welcome Management, Welcome International and Welcome All.
- Introduce schemes such as the British Hospitality Association's Profit though Profitability programme where they can clearly add value.
- Promote awareness of market trends and techniques, business planning, legislation and good environmental practice.
- Help tourism businesses benefit from European, national and local funding.
- Ensure that delivery plans for Learning and Skills Councils include tourism.
- Ensure that there are tourism experts available to offer business support & advice. Provide training for these experts.



This page: 'Miner in the Park, Miner's Welfare Park, Bedworth. (Picture NBBC)

5.2 Committed to Quality Assurance

Participation in the official Quality Assurance schemes is a key part of achieving improved quality across the board and of giving customers assurance of the standards that they can expect.

The most important schemes are those that apply to accommodation, the National Quality Assurance Schemes, covering serviced and self-catering accommodation and holiday parks. From January 2006 Visit Britain will only promote quality assured businesses.

A quality assurance scheme for attractions, The Visitor Attractions Quality Assurance Service (VAQAS), contains a high level of quality consultancy and advice as well as an accreditation to help in marketing.

Strategy

- Provide quality assurance assessment.
- Help and encourage operators to seek quality assurance and to keep upgrading.
- Encourage take-up of the Visitor Attractions Quality Assessment Scheme.

5.3 Creating Clusters

The Regional Visitor Economy Strategy places a high priority on encouraging businesses and other organisations to work together for mutual benefit. The Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support (RCTBS) is a key partner in this.

Strategy

- Target specific expert advice and funding to the stimulus and support of cluster initiatives.
- Thematic promotions (See Section 4.6).

5.4 Providing Information

Information provision, whether in person or on-line (or through a call centre or Tourist Information Point hybrid), is an important part of the tourism infrastructure.

The creation of a quality destination management system across the sub-region, one that is fully integrated with EnglandNet, is a core part of this. This requires not just the installation of hardware, but an enhancement of the "account manager" role described above and the provision of backup call centre facilities.

This is as relevant to the provision of information to businesses as it is to the provision of information to visitors.

Strategy

- Take a partnership approach to DMS development, potentially building on the South Warwickshire Tourism system.
- Develop Stratford TIC as a regional flagship visitor centre.
- Redevelop and expand the TIC and service at Warwick, and explore joining it to the South Warwickshire tourism network.
- Reposition library services as local community information centres.
- Improve TIC at Kenilworth.
- Investigate mobile / temporary TIC at major events such as the Royal Show.
- Information provision at Ricoh Arena to be particularly targeted at business / event visitors.

5.5 Business Support

The Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support - a partnership between Advantage West Midlands and Business Links in the West Midlands - provides a "one-stop shop" through which tourism business and potential business can find business information, receive specialist business advice and training to develop their enterprise.

The Centre provides proactive business support through county-based advisors, an information resource centre and is developing new networks and support services specifically for businesses in the tourism and leisure cluster. (One important and well-used advice service relates to the Disability Discrimination Act and ensuring physical accessibility of facilities.) It also covers issues of workforce development and training.

Strategy

- Promote private sector engagement with the Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support.

Above: Warwickshire has an abundance of country pubs and picturesque villages such as Baxterley, near Atherstone.

5.6 Better Tourist Information

For many visitors, maps, tourist information points and "in-situ" information are the most useful form of information.

Technology developments have increased the opportunities for providing interactive information but their effectiveness will, to a large extent, be dependent upon the quality and range of information available.

Destination Management Systems offer the opportunity to do more in the way of tourist information provision via audio visual tourist information points. Searchable IT screens offer an excellent alternative to tatty and frequently out-of-date leaflet points.

Destination management partnerships will need to consider what is needed in order to maintain and develop information about the visitor facilities and attractions in their areas, including the provision of foreign language materials.

Strategy

- Give TIPs priority in key tourist locations and gateways, such as Stratford, Coventry or Rugby train stations, for example.
- Investigate the possibility of a network of interactive TIPs using information from the Destination Management System.
- The Destination Management Partnership and destination marketing organisations to review the information available to visitors to their areas.

5.7 Better Sign-posting

Tourism signs can make a major difference to the ease with which tourists can travel around. They can also make a major difference to awareness of attractions. Similarly, maps and other information at railway and bus stations can make it much easier for visitors to orient themselves and find their way around.

There is typically frustration at the difficulty in getting permission for tourist signs and at what is perceived to be inconsistent interpretation of the rules and their high cost. The Department of Transport has recently reviewed its guidelines on tourism signage.

Strategy

- Lead a concerted effort to agree a consistent approach by the various highway authorities in Coventry and Warwickshire.
- Provide practical help and advice for tourism business to obtain highway signage.
- Audit current signage provision.

5.8 Excellent Events

The Regional Visitor Economy places considerable emphasis on events. Coventry and Warwickshire has many events of many types – agricultural and horse shows, country fairs, horse racing, steam rallies, village fetes, outdoor concerts, farmers' markets, sporting events, arts and music festivals, historic re-enactments and so on. Events are typically best organised at local level, but there is a lot to be gained from better co-ordination and more professional expertise in planning and marketing them.

Strategy

- Provide expert advice in the management and promotion of events.
- Provide co-ordination so that events across the sub region are synchronised, do not compete, and have optimum benefit, especially in terms of encouraging staying tourists.

5.9 Promoting Food and Drink

Food and drink is a critical part of the experience for many visitors and can add significantly to the sense of place. Pubs and restaurants are often destinations in their own right. Parts of Warwickshire are particularly strong in this respect.

Tourism is a means by which farmers can diversify. Farm Stay, farm attractions and Farmers Markets are obvious manifestations of this.

Strategy

- Encourage the development of top quality "destination" pubs and restaurants.
- Encourage the development of identification/branding of foods unique to Coventry and Warwickshire and localities within it.
- Facilitate dialogue between farmers and tourism operators.
- Encourage destinations to champion good local produce and to buy locally.

5.10 Fair Access

The Disability Discrimination Act has created a legislative impetus to improve conditions for the disabled. Tourism employers can improve access by providing appropriate facilities and by staff training.

It is also important to make sure that people who speak other languages are able to fully enjoy the tourism product, especially in areas such as Stratford and Warwick Castle, which are internationally famous.

Strategy

- Help operators understand and comply with the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Encourage participation in the National Accessible Scheme (the quality assurance scheme for accommodation designed for people with disabilities).
- Encourage the provision of information and promotional material in a range of languages and formats where appropriate and feasible.

Above: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon attracts huge visitor numbers and helps bring customers to other venues such as the Stratford Butterfly Farm (far right). (Pictures SWT)

6 Shakespeare Supreme

6.1 An International Icon

Foremost among the region's high-value brands are those related to Shakespeare:

- Stratford-upon-Avon.
- Shakespeare Country.
- The Royal Shakespeare Company.
- Shakespeare's Birthplace.

Stratford-upon-Avon is the strongest tourism brand in the sub-region. It has a strong national and international presence. A key strategic objective must be to make the most of it.

6.2 A Regional Priority

The Regional Visitor Economy Strategy encourages investment in the region's key destinations.

Stratford and Warwick – taking in both town centres and the corridor/countryside between them – is one of them.

It is highlighted as a priority area for investment in infrastructure and destination services, including information provision.

The Regional Strategy highlights the following generic agenda for enhancing the contribution of key destinations:

- Efficient and dynamic destination management
- Focus on adding value per visit
- Sustainability planning (environmental and economic)
- Workforce development
- Quality of accommodation, food and drink, retail, early evening and night-time economy
- Transport infrastructure and information
- Information provision
- Thematic connections to disperse visitors into the region
- Investment in core products
- Integrated marketing of visitor-friendly destination brands
- Play to the region's assets and strengths
- Differentiation / unique WM propositions.

6.3 Polishing a Cultural Icon

Shakespeare has universal appeal, and modern interpretation of his work on film and stage shows that it is possible to make him contemporary and relevant to new generations. To make the best of its links with the Bard Stratford needs to invest to maintain its image.

Strategy

- Communication and delivery of the Stratford masterplan.
- Enhancement of the Royal Shakespeare Company theatre complex and the river front.
- Pedestrianisation and improvement to the public realm in Stratford.
- Engage the retail and private sector.

6.4 An International Cultural Icon

Stratford has the potential to become as one of the world's leading cultural destinations such as Verona, Bayreuth or a Salzburg.

It should be seen as the region's primary cultural asset, and a national priority in terms of addressing the deteriorating balance of payments on tourism.

In this respect events and festivals with national and international appeal play a key role.

There is also an opportunity to make the Shakespeare product more accessible. Much is "behind closed doors and ticket only". There are opportunities for more street theatre, "in the park" activities, etc.

Strategy

- Focus on developing the cultural offer.
- Repositioning in marketing.

6.5 An International Conference Venue

As an internationally famous destination, Stratford is also in a good position to develop conference trade, especially in the international association market.

Strategy

- Develop the conference offer as an integral part of the "Britain's Conference Country" positioning.

6.6 Improving Access

Stratford also acts as a 'gateway' to the region and the destination deserves special attention in terms of transport, information provision and quality of service. Comparable iconic attractions in other countries are far better served by public transport[2].

Strategy

- Prioritise access improvement in Masterplan.
- Encourage involvement of bus and train operators in improving access.

2. A striking contrast is the rail service to the small heritage town of Rothenburg-ob-Tauer in Bavaria.
It is a branch line service mainly for tourists, but served by modern and attractive trains that meet the main line services.

6.7 A Gateway

It is also a regional priority that Stratford fulfils a regionally significant role as a gateway, encouraging first time and overseas visitors in particular to explore other West Midlands destinations.

Strategy

- Develop the TIC into a regional flagship.

6.8 Connecting to Warwick, Leamington Spa and Kenilworth

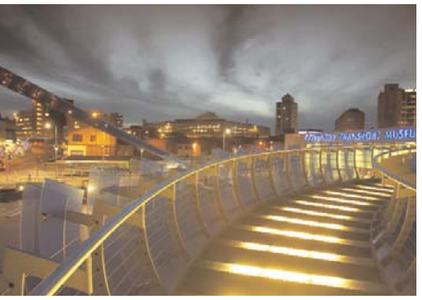
Nearby Warwick, Leamington Spa and Kenilworth are fine destinations that have a good fit with the Stratford offer.

Warwick Castle is one of the leading heritage attractions in the country. It is owned by the country's leading and most professional attractions company and maintains an active and developing programme of events.

Kenilworth also has a fine castle, and Royal Leamington Spa has a genteel aspect and a fine and sophisticated shopping offer.

Strategy

- Improvements to the public realm in Warwick and expansion of the TIC.
- Sustain the close integration of the marketing of the four destinations.



Above: The Coventry skyline viewed from the Millennium Arch.

Opposite: Coventry Cathedral ruins by night. (Picture CV One)

7 Cathedral City

7.1 A Regional Priority

The Regional Visitor Economy Strategy encourages regeneration investment in the region's 'destinations of the future', including Coventry, where it highlights the importance of events, sports and business tourism as well as the development of the Cathedral Quarter and the Arena.

Coventry Airport also has the potential to grow in importance as a gateway to the region.

7.2 Cathedral City

However, Coventry suffers from its image as a post war, industrial city. The "must see" status of the Cathedrals once enjoyed in the 60s and 70s has dwindled.

A Cathedral City has attractive "urban grain" – an urban ambience that is pleasant to walk around. It has nice shops, nice places to eat, "nooks and crannies", and a vibrant, cosmopolitan environment.

Aiming for this seems to be the way for Coventry to proceed.

A core ingredient of this is the cultural offer. The Herbert Art Gallery and the Belgrade Theatre are opportunities to greatly enhance the quality of the cultural offer in Coventry and to enhance its appeal as a destination.

They need to be seen, however, not as stand alone cultural "boxes" but as an integrated part of the wider city experience[3], and especially as integrated parts of the cathedral quarter experience.

Strategy

- Refreshment and enhancement of the Peace and Reconciliation theme, with the city positioning itself as Europe's clear leader in that respect.

7.2 Promoting Peace and Reconciliation

Coventry has a unique reputation as a centre for Peace and Reconciliation. The city's proactive approach since the tragedies of the Second World War is embodied in its cathedral, preserving the old, but highlighting the potential of the new.

3. The Millennium Galleries and Winter Gardens in Sheffield are an excellent example of this.

7.3 Fifties Fervour

Coventry was largely rebuilt in the 1950s after wartime destruction. It has an exceptional concentration of buildings from that era. There is increasing nostalgia for the 1950s, which are seen in memory as being safe and prosperous times.

Strategy

- Increase understanding and appreciation of the city's 1950s heritage. A feature of this could be a Fifties Festival and Swing / Jazz revival.

7.4 Motor City

Coventry has a strong motor heritage embodied in the Museum of British Road Transport. The rebranding as the Coventry Transport Museum brings a new lease of life. There are opportunities for packaging with other sub regional attractions such as the Heritage Motor Centre at Gaydon. The Coventry Shakespeare vintage car run has potential national appeal given investment. A historic car rally linking Coventry to Oxford (another motor city) running through the Cotswolds could be a significant event to rival the London to Brighton event.

Rallies and joint activity with Birmingham and Wolverhampton reflect the motoring heritage of the West Midlands. Reinstatement of the National Motorcycle Museum near the NEC adds to the critical mass of attractions in the area.

Northern Warwickshire, especially Nuneaton, is engaged in motor sports initiatives that support this theme.

Strategy

- Packaging and development of the motor city theme in conjunction with regional theme: Past and Future Innovation.

Above: the market place in Atherstone. (Picture NWBC)

Facing page: Arbury Hall in Nuneaton. (Picture NBBC)

Strategy

- Lead the region in the application of the Destination Management Partnership principles, enhancing the capabilities of the DMPs in line with the Regional Strategy.
- Ensure that as many tourism operations as possible are in membership of one or more DMPs (provided they meet quality standards).
- Capture resource that formerly went to Visit Heart of England through membership subscriptions.

8 Effective Delivery

8.1 The New Regional Context

The Regional Visitor Economy Strategy has made substantial changes to the organisation of tourism in the West Midlands.

Visit Heart of England, the Regional Tourist Board, has evolved into the regional tourism agency, Heart of England Tourism, that will deliver a limited range of tourism services such as marketing the region, research, quality assurance, and best practice. It will no longer have membership.

Tourism West Midlands is the new Strategic Body overseeing tourism in the region.

There will be more emphasis on the sub regions. The region will develop or strengthen a small number of "Destination Management Partnerships", which do not necessarily correspond to administrative sub-regions. Industry membership will normally be at this level.

These Destination Management Partnerships will become the main agents for the development and marketing of tourism around the region. Their remit will extend beyond marketing to all aspects of the destination product. They will be taking over some of Visit Heart of England's activities. They will have a key role in the selection of a channelling of funding to tourism projects.

The Regional Strategy is based on the premise that DMPs will:

- Reduce duplication of public expenditure and clarify marketing messages;
- Reflect a partnership of local authorities with the private sector to manage and market a small family of brands;
- Communicate and interlock with other sub-regional and local authority functions such as planning and inward investment;
- Work closely with regeneration & town / city centre management companies – in some instances being combined with them;
- Run TICs / DMSs / accommodation and attraction guides / co-ordinate festivals and events;
- Connect with each other and with the regional support structure;
- Work across regional and county boundaries in partnerships.

8.2 Representing the Industry

The first challenge is to ensure that there are effective means of representing and engaging with the private sector through Destination Management Partnerships.

Strategy

- Encourage all tourism stakeholders to have membership of at least one of the destination management organisations in the sub region.

8.3 National Leaders

Coventry & Warwickshire is already recognised nationally as a leader in the development of Destination Management Partnerships. South Warwickshire Tourism and CVOne are both acknowledged as examples of best practice.

CVOne is a unique example of tourism management being integrated with city centre management. This is a great advance on the situation in other cities because is gives real power to the DMP in developing and managing the tourism product.

South Warwickshire Tourism, which manages the Shakespeare Country brand, is also a benchmark for the integration of local authority tourism activities[4] into a centralised organisation. It is predominantly a marketing and visitor services organisation.

Both partnerships have membership schemes. Both cover information services and CVOne has a key city centre management role. They act as commercial, not-for-profit organisations. Both work well and are used as best practice role models elsewhere in the UK.

They are structures to retain and develop as new opportunities emerge in conjunction with organisational change at regional level (both in the West Midlands and in neighbouring regions).

Currently there is no Destination Management Partnership for the remaining parts of Warwickshire. The three local authorities – North Warwickshire, Nuneaton & Bedworth and Rugby – each have relatively limited tourism resources but are committed to developing their tourism potential.

Warwickshire County Council is developing its strategic role in tourism, building on a wide range of existing responsibilities that have an important influence – country parks, libraries and TICs, museums, signposting, public transport, etc.

CSWP Ltd, the economic development partnership is establishing a Visitor Economy Forum, on behalf of the organisations mentioned above, to raise the profile of the visitor economy and to steer coordination and joint working between those involved.

Strategy

- Investigate the restructuring of tourism so that all areas of the county are covered by a Destination Management Partnership.
- Develop a strategic approach to development through the Visitor Economy Forum

4. Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick Districts.

Above: A guided tour around attractions in South Warwickshire. (Picture SWT)

8.4 Working without Borders

There is potential for both South Warwickshire Tourism and CVOne to grow their destinations. There is a strong argument, for example, for South Warwickshire Tourism to extend into the Cotswolds because of brand synergy. There may be other opportunities.

Strategy

- Look for opportunities to expand the geographical remit of the Destination Management Organisations, provided it does not prejudice the interests of their core stakeholders.

8.5 Lively Town & City Centres

Town centres are recognised as an important part of the visitor economy and local authorities and their partners are committed to reviving and regenerating their town and city centres.

Coventry and Warwickshire's main towns all have town centre management partnerships and programmes for the improvement of their centres. Coventry and Rugby are both pilot Business Improvement Districts.

The Rugby pilot is unique in its objective of providing a model for the application of good practice in town centre management to the other major towns of Warwickshire.

9 Priority Actions

The Coventry and Warwickshire Tourism Officers Group will be preparing a detailed action plan following the launch of this strategy.

Elements of this strategy fall within the jurisdiction of a variety of parties. Attractive visitor destinations depend on high quality and innovative tourism product and promotion, town centre management and a range of services provided by local authorities. Successful delivery will, therefore, depend upon incorporation of these action points in their plans.

There are, however, a number of actions arising from this strategy that are priorities. The Coventry & Warwickshire Tourism Officers Group will nominate one member to take the lead in developing the action. The priorities are

- **Destination Health Check:**
- Work with Heart of England Tourism Agency to establish the procedure for destination health checks, and then pilot these in the sub-region starting with Stratford upon Avon which is an international cultural icon.
- **Britain's Conference Country:**
- Open discussions with Marketing Birmingham and the NEC Group about the development of a brand based on the idea of Britain's Conference Country and what the implications are.
- **A Strong Brand Portfolio:**
- Start discussions about thematic campaigns that might be developed under a Warwickshire brand and how they might be organised.
- **Impressive Infrastructure:**
- Develop Stratford's TIC to be a regional flagship fulfilling its role as a gateway to the region.
- Take a partnership approach to the development of a Destination Management System (DMS) for the sub-region.
- Work with the LSC, Heart of England Tourism and the Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support to define how business support and skill development will be delivered.
- **Effective Delivery:**
- Support the Visitor Economy Forum to develop a strategic approach to tourism infrastructure.
- Investigate how the whole sub-region can engage with DMPs.
- Join up marketing and promotion activities of organisations managing town centres and visitor destinations.
- Establish an evening strategy in one location acting as a model for others to follow.
- Commission reliable and consistent research and data across the sub-region to monitor the health of the visitor economy and the effectiveness of the strategy

10 Useful contacts

Key people and organisations for the visitor economy in Coventry & Warwickshire

Tourist Information Centres

NUNEATON
The Library, Church Street,
Nuneaton CV11 4DR
T: 024 7638 4027
F: 024 7635 0125
E: nuneatonlibrary@warwickshire.gov.uk
www.enjoywarwickshire.com
www.northwarks.gov.uk
www.nuneatonandbedworth.gov.uk

RUGBY
Visitor Centre,
Rugby Art Gallery & Museum,
Little Elborow St, Rugby CV21 3BZ
T: 01788 534970
F: 01788 534979
E: visitor.centre@rugby.gov.uk
Web: www.rugby.gov.uk

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON
Bridgefoot,
Stratford-Upon-Avon CV37 6GW
T: 0870 1607930
F: 01789 295262
E: stratfordtic@shakespeare-country.co.uk
Web: www.shakespeare-country.co.uk

LEAMINGTON SPA
The Royal Pump Rooms,
The Parade, Leamington Spa CV32 4AB
T: 01926 742762
F: 01926 742766
E: leamington@shakespeare-country.co.uk
www.shakespeare-country.co.uk

WARWICK
The Court House,
Jury Street, Warwick CV34 4EW
T: 01926 492212
E: warwicktic@btconnect.co.uk
www.warwick-uk.co.uk

KENILWORTH
The Library,
Smalley Place, Kenilworth CV8 1QG
T: 01926 852595
F: 01926 864503
www.enjoywarwickshire.com
www.shakespeare-country.co.uk

COVENTRY
4 Priory Row, Coventry CV1 5EX
T: 024 7622 7264
F: 024 7622 7255
E: tic@cvone.co.uk
www.visitcoventry.co.uk

Business Support

REGIONAL CENTRE FOR TOURISM BUSINESS SUPPORT (QUALITY AT HEART)
Anne Cumberlidge – Advisor for Coventry & Warwickshire
T: 0845 241 8269
E: acumberlidge@qualityatheart.co.uk
www.qualityatheart.co.uk

COVENTRY & WARWICKSHIRE CHAMBER/BUSINESS LINK
T: 024 7665 4321
E: info@cw-chamber.co.uk
www.cw-chamber.co.uk

WARWICKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - BUSINESS SUPPORT TEAM
T: 01926 412649
E: econdev@warwickshire.gov.uk
www.warwickshire.gov.uk

COVENTRY CITY COUNCIL – INVESTMENT AND BUSINESS SERVICES
T: 024 7683 1208
E: rachael.delich@coventry.gov.uk
www.coventry.gov.uk

Or contact the Economic Development team at your local district council.

Destination Marketing

SOUTH WARWICKSHIRE TOURISM – SHAKESPEARE COUNTRY
T: 0870 160 7930
E: info@shakespeare-country.co.uk
www.shakespeare-country.co.uk

CVONE – COVENTRY
T: 024 7660 7000
E: tic@cvone.co.uk
www.visitcoventry.co.uk

RUGBY BOROUGH COUNCIL
T: 01788 533848
E: jan.dunseith@rugby.gov.uk
www.rugby.gov.uk

RUGBY TOURISM ASSOCIATION
T: 01788 533839
E: manager@rugbytourism.org.uk
www.rugbytourism.org.uk

NUNEATON & BEDWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL
T: 024 7637 6490
E: rose.selwyn@nuneatonandbedworth.gov.uk
www.nuneatonandbedworth.gov.uk

NORTHERN WARWICKSHIRE TOURISM ASSOCIATION
T: 01675 465695
E: info@visitnorthernwarwickshire.com
www.visitnorthernwarwickshire.com

NORTH WARWICKSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL
T: 01827 719301
E: rachelsamways@northwarks.gov.uk
www.northwarks.gov.uk

WARWICKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
T: 01926 414150
E: tourism@warwickshire.gov.uk
www.enjoywarwickshire.com