

Brief: Milton Keynes Tourism Strategy

OBJECTIVES

Milton Keynes requires a Tourism Strategy which captures and articulates the current position of tourism within MK and sets out an approach to best support the growth and development of the sector in the short, medium and longer term.

Milton Keynes City Council (the Local Authority for the city) and Destination Milton Keynes (the Destination Management Organisation for the city) work in partnership to support the tourism sector and often take the lead on the commissioning, development and delivery of city-wide marketing/promotional campaigns. These two organisations are the lead partners for the delivery of the Tourism Strategy.

The Tourism Strategy will need to:

- define the need
- map the opportunities
- establish a vision, themes, strategic goals and objectives that reflects Milton Keynes regional importance
- develop an ongoing evaluation and monitoring infrastructure

- Deliver to the wider city, sub-regional economic development, social and recovery strategies

In developing the Strategy we will want to:

1. Assess our current performance against potential.
2. Understand the challenges – to highlight the current issues which are preventing the tourism sector and wider visitor economy from performing to its full potential.
3. Identify the market opportunities – to identify priority market segments based on our existing and potential product appeal, strengths, accessibility & reach.
4. Prioritise the development of relevant tourism assets, which will increase visitor numbers and spend in response to market opportunity, demand and trends.
5. Develop a destination vision – that has clarity, sector ownership and can inspire.

6. Develop the destination brand - to understand how the destination story and tourism strategy aligns with MK's existing place brand. How will the story be experienced and told – for example through collaboration with the cultural, sporting and heritage sectors and through new technologies.
7. Develop best destination marketing practices – to identify exemplar destination management structures and how these may be adapted and adopted, including brand management, data and intelligence, evaluation and cross-sector partnership building.

Milton Keynes in context

The City of Milton Keynes is home to almost 300,000 people and has ambitious plans for future growth. In 2022, the city was formally awarded city status, an important milestone in its journey to establishing itself as an alternative and viable tourism destination. The city is made up of a regionally and nationally significant city centre, a number of high streets and towns with their own identities (including Bletchley, Newport Pagnell, Stony Stratford and Olney) as well as a large rural area. The economy of Milton Keynes is very strong, and constantly ranks as one of the top UK city economies in terms of size, growth and productivity.

Historically, pre pandemic, the city had a strong business visitor economy and attracted large numbers of visitors for a calendar of cultural and sporting events. Examples include IF: Milton Keynes International Festival, City of Codes and Light and The Parks Trust's concert programme in Campbell Park. Additionally, Stadium MK has been a frequent host of high profile sporting events, as well as programming highly successful large-scale concerts. In July 2023, The National Bowl (run by Stadium MK) hosted a concert by Muse with an attendance of 45,000. Alongside the city's cultural and sporting events schedule, Milton Keynes boasts a wealth of successful cultural organisations including Milton Keynes Theatre, Bletchley Park, MK Gallery, The Stables and Milton Keynes Museum. The retail and leisure sector is also well represented with major attractions such as centre:mk, Xscape and large local centres including Kingston, MK1 and Westcroft and the high streets of Bletchley, Newport Pagnell, Stony Stratford, Wolverton, Olney and Woburn Sands as examples.

Destination Milton Keynes is the DMO covering the whole city area of Milton Keynes. Its aim is to 'make Milton Keynes a destination of choice.' Destination Milton Keynes runs a website - [Home - Destination Milton Keynes](#) - and social media accounts promoting what's on in Milton Keynes and the work of their members. In September 2021, the De Bois independent review of Destination Management Organisations (DMO) in England was published looking at the future of DMOs. Destination Milton Keynes are currently leading on the development

of a partnership approach to a potential regional DMO delivery¹. The Tourism Strategy for Milton Keynes will be an important mechanism for articulating the vision for Milton Keynes' visitor economy in the short, medium and longer term and will feed into the development of this partnership delivery approach.

In 2022 a new city brand was launched - [A new city brand for Milton Keynes | Milton Keynes City Council \(milton-keynes.gov.uk\)](https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk)- to provide partners and stakeholders with a consistent and engaging set of city marketing assets and key messages. The city tag line – Better by Design- and the messages established in the 'Better by Design Manifesto' should feature in any messaging developed.

PROJECT SPECIFICATION

The project will explore the following:

- 1. Establishing a Baseline and SWOT** – at present we have limited shared intelligence, data and evidence in respect of the overall MK visitor economy.
 - A review of available data sources will help establish a baseline to inform KPIs; enable us to prioritise; identify future opportunities and inform overall Strategy development. It will also identify data gaps and opportunities for improved future data collection, sharing and insight reporting.
 - A SWOT of MK's tourism/visitor economy offer will be required, alongside the review of a number of MKCC Strategies – such as MK2050, the Creative and Cultural Strategy, Retail and Leisure Study, Growth and Opportunities Study for CMK and other relevant papers (Visit England, immediate competitor Tourism Strategies etc.)

The AUDIT/SWOT should consider:

- Destination perception in and out of Milton Keynes, positioning and current performance
- Strategic investments and alignments
- Partnerships (national, regional, local - strategic, delivery)
- Infrastructure, including transport and technology
- Product & Experience - market appeal, range, quality, messaging, pipeline and aspirations
- Marketing & Communications - brand, assets, channels, infrastructure, campaigns
- Skills and capacity

¹ From the City Council's perspective, established working already takes place on a regional footprint across the South East Midlands area, covering the administrative areas of Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes, North and West Northamptonshire.

- Impact Monitoring

Alongside desk research we would expect in-depth qualitative information gathering via consultation, engagement and workshops. Milton Keynes City Council and Destination Milton Keynes will provide the appointed consultants with a list of stakeholders and partners who will need to be consulted as part of this initial research phase.

2. Market Assessment

Following on from the performance audit and SWOT, we will require a market assessment for Milton Keynes which will identify priority markets (for each of independent visitors, trade, business).

This will draw on the audit review/overview of existing market segments to include, **where reliable data is available,**

- Visitor volume and value
- Visitor profile
- Visitor motivations & behaviours (why do they come / what do they do / dwell time)
- Visitor journey (drawing on digital analytics SEO, bookability analysis & keyword research)

And scope out the future visitor market profile and segments for Milton Keynes, drawing on available data, industry trends and comparator/competitor analysis ('like' places, nearby places, industry/sector data)

2. **Branding and Marketing:** To effectively market and promote Milton Keynes as a unique destination, a strong branding and marketing strategy will need to be developed.

This strategy should build on baseline evidence and explore how a MK 'destination brand' can best complement the recent 'Better by Design' place brand commission and assets. We will want to understand how those involved in delivering our tourism experience, such as the city's cultural and sporting offer, innovative design, green space, accommodation/hospitality and transport providers feel they can deliver to and align with the place brand. How is 'Better by Design' currently experienced across the tourism offer and what is its potential? What does that mean for the destination brand and strategy development, design of visit experience / offer / etc?

As part of the scope of works a comprehensive marketing strategy and action plan should be outlined that will include partnership and networking, digital and offline assets, social media, and PR to raise awareness and promote the city. Activity should consider channels, assets and infrastructure (especially digital) but also skills development. NB: It may be necessary to commission further place branding assets and or augment the 'Better by Design' to best deliver the campaign requirements.

- Partnerships and Collaborations:** To create a year-round 'destination offer and experience', enhance the visitor experience and attract more visitors, partnerships and collaborations with local businesses, cultural & sporting institutions, and events/activity providers are essential. The Strategy will need to outline a methodology for a sustainable approach to partnership working – particularly between the hospitality sector and activity providers in order to establish and embed better mutual understanding and find ways to raise the bar in how the whole sector works better together, develops and markets new product, builds itineraries and so on. The Strategy will set out shared expectations and desired outcomes and make recommendations for models and pathfinder programmes to support collaborative working, drawing on good practice examples wherever relevant.

Collaboration with the local community and wider stakeholders (such as skills and FE/HE provision) will be important to ensure that the tourism strategy reflects the needs and aspirations of MK overall. The Strategy should consider how the local community engages with and benefits from growth in the tourism economy, and how to sustain partnership working.

In addition to local partnerships and networks, the Strategy should explore how it connects into regional partnerships & campaigns which work across geo-political borders - e.g. South East, East & West Midlands, Cotswolds, Oxford-Cambridge corridor, Grand Union Canal.

- Product Development:** MK has a range of existing attractions that should be developed and enhanced to attract more visitors. The Strategy should identify and articulate these opportunities and how best to deliver to them. Additionally, new interventions particularly in central Milton Keynes (CMK) are being developed to increase the city's appeal and competitiveness. Examples include a new food, drink and cultural programme offer in CMK market; a series of newly commissioned digital artworks and a Spring Spectacle mass participation event. The Strategy needs to ensure tourism product development factors bookable experience development to respond to industry needs, trends and market behaviours, and considers the development of products, events and experiences - and itineraries and packages -

which are tailored to the target growth visitor markets and brand positioning of MK, as a destination and a place.

5. **Infrastructure, Connectivity and Accessibility:** To facilitate growth in visitor numbers, it is essential that the city's infrastructure and accessibility are improved. Good infrastructure and connectivity, and accessibility are critical to a city's attractiveness and as a result, to its visitor economy offer. Milton Keynes as a city has a unique offer in its infrastructure thanks in large part to its new town heritage. The Tourism Strategy will need to undertake a SWOT analysis against assess current and future plans for improved infrastructure and transport provision in MK and propose additional measures/interventions where appropriate. Improving digital infrastructure is also crucial. Digital transformation infrastructure and activity will be required to enhance the visibility, visitor experience, business/product viability and data automation and reporting. The Strategy should undertake a SWOT analysis of current digital infrastructure and include recommendations for improvements including workforce development – both skills and capacity.
6. **Sustainable Tourism:** The Tourism Strategy should promote sustainable tourism practices to ensure that the visitor economy is both economically and environmentally sustainable, developing a sustainable, predictable, manageable growth. In a city which is 'better by design', what does this mean for adopting and embedding responsible/regenerative tourism strategy and practices? This includes promoting low-carbon transport options, reducing waste and promoting recycling, and encouraging visitors to engage in responsible tourism practices.

CONSULTANT SPECIFICATION

In order to deliver a Strategic Plan, we will be looking for consultant/consultancy team that can:

1. Provide intelligence and insights in consumer and business tourism for priority market segments, as the basis for strategic priority setting, e.g. making recommendations for future growth / tourism development areas, prioritising areas that will generate greatest economic benefit for the area and most appropriate routes to market.
2. Provide examples of how a tourism strategy can be a dynamic and visible part of wider image-making and perception change activities.
3. Provide examples of other destinations that have successfully developed their positioning and tourism experience through effective partnerships with other

sectors most especially with culture & heritage, sport, but including business and higher education.

4. Review existing available research on the visitor product offer to identify those with the potential of appealing to the domestic and international markets.
5. Provide a spatial mapping overview of who manages and has responsibility for the tourism offer, including visitor attractions/experiences and business tourism products, and what issues currently exist.
6. Understand the implications of the national DMO review on destinations such as MK.
7. Have 1:1 meetings with key product and service providers to find out directly from them how their product is performing in the current market and assess their future plans and aspirations.
8. Discuss with key tourism stakeholders and partners (including those in the public and private sector) how they value and want to engage with local / regional destination management.
9. Carry out a benchmarking exercise on the visitor experience sector in a selection of comparable / competitor markets, identifying what allows them to stand out in those markets, and what they have done to enhance their offering, as well as image and destination brand management.
10. To further inform future promotional activity, benchmark DMO best practice in generating greater awareness and visitor numbers for comparable destination towns and cities; recommending a future DMO / partnership model with regard to collaborating with both public and private sector stakeholders across the MK city region – based on a gap analysis of the strengths and weakness of the current regional tourism offer.
11. Offer a roadmap of key actions to enable sector growth that is sustainable and inclusive; set out specific, agreed, deliverable actions and partner buy-in needed to deliver the vision and goals.
12. Outline evaluation KPIs, timeframes, monitoring framework and performance indicators.

To undertake the above requirements, the successful contractor will be expected to travel throughout Milton Keynes and the sub-region for site visits and meetings with relevant stakeholders.

OUTPUTS

The service provider will need to deliver an interim report by November 2023 that can be used for stakeholder engagement / consultation, with the final, full report and strategy being provided by the end of the project at the end of January 2024.

Required outputs include:

1. A range of stakeholder engagement workshops and interviews and their key findings.
2. Research insights report highlighting:

- a. Situational analysis of the visitor experience offer of MK in 2023;
 - b. Relevant domestic and international tourism trends and market opportunities;
 - c. Regional place benchmarking analysis to include how the city region is perceived and performing as a tourism destination;
 - d. Recommended place marketing hierarchy for international, national and regional audiences;
 - e. Overview on DMO best practice and context for DMK in a changing landscape and in particular the Du Bois Review.
3. Competitive positioning for the MK tourism offer:
 - a. City value proposition;
 - b. Sectors and sub-sectors of consumer / business tourism market with strongest investment / development potential;
 - c. Recommended positioning to leverage benefits of [any major anchor attractions, events or [investments]].
 4. Tourism Strategy to include:
 - a. Recommended city / place value proposition (e.g. the core offer, and value it delivers to the economy, local and market needs it meets etc.), and brand alignment and messaging
 - b. Recommended marketing communications infrastructure, channels and key assets – for priority market segments;
 - c. Recommended collaboration models for private / public sector to maximise tourism economic benefits for the city region;
 - d. Recommended roles for MK City Council and DMK and further core partners.
 - e. Action Planning

The strategy needs to be pragmatic and provide for contingencies within a 5 year lifetime, taking into account that we are still experiencing significant disruptions caused by current economic challenges and the pandemic.

CONTRACTOR SPECIFICATION

- Successful track record in developing strategic partnerships, consulting and engaging with multiple stakeholders with different approaches, markets and areas of focus.
- Experience of research, consultation and evaluation in the tourism sector (and related sectors including culture, heritage, place), including the research, development and delivery of strategies that have achieved their vision.
- Experience in strategy process, development and design.
- Experience in engagement, mapping and strategic analysis tools.
- Good understanding of the challenges tourism in MK faces, including those as a result of the pandemic.
- Good knowledge of the national and regional tourism landscape, government policy and future trends.
- Understanding of the financial, political and resource pressures facing local authorities and their partners.

TENDER PROCESS INFORMATION

Project management

Destination Milton Keynes CEO and representatives from MKCC's Culture and Economy team's will be responsible for the management of this project. The successful contractor will liaise with DMK's CEO, MKCC's Head of Economy and Creative and Cultural Manager. A project management structure will be implemented including a steering group involving key stakeholders with relevant expertise.

An inception meeting will take place following appointment. Updates and progress reports must be provided on a regular basis i.e. end of 1st month; midpoint interim report with the final report presented by the end of January 2024. The contractor must also provide updates as and when required.

Milton Keynes City Council and Destination Milton Keynes will acquire Intellectual Property Rights in relation to the services being provided under this contract.

A schedule of staged payments can be discussed at the initiation meeting.

Project Schedule Summary

The project duration will be approximately 5 months.

Milestone	Date
Inception meeting	September 2023
Client online catch-ups	September 2023 – January 2024
Stakeholder engagement	October – November 2023
Audit and SWOT findings report	November 2023
Strategy framework	November 2023
Strategy first draft	December 2023
Strategy Final	January 2024
Presentations and Handover	January 2024

Project value

The anticipated maximum value of this contract is up to £35,000 excluding VAT. All bids in excess of this value will be disregarded.

Submission assessment

TENDER RESPONSE

We require:

1. Company information.

2. Full list of your team, including proposed role and relevant experience for this project.
3. Experience and relevant case studies (minimum of three).
4. Full methodology to meet the requirements.
5. Realistic and detailed project schedule
6. Total costing with task breakdown, including all forecasted expenses.
7. Approach to project management and working with the client.

Your submission should be supplied to culture@milton-keynes.gov.uk This is the same contact information for any questions or clarifications whilst preparing your submission.

Selection process	Date
Brief published to www.destinationmiltonkeynes.co.uk	21 st August 2023
Deadline for clarifications	4 th September 2023
Deadline for tender submission	11 th September 2023
Target date for evaluation and decision	20 th September 2023
Target date for award notification and appointment	22 nd September 2023
Target start date	29 th September 2023

FURTHER INFORMATION

Supporting documentation

The following resources/documents are available to download/view at [URL]:

- Destination Milton Keynes - [Home - Destination Milton Keynes](#)
- New City Brand for Milton Keynes - [A new city brand for Milton Keynes | Milton Keynes City Council \(milton-keynes.gov.uk\)](#)
- <https://www.mkfutures2050.com/>
- [https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-01/MKCreative %26 Cultural Strategy 2018-2027 MKCOM003.pdf](https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-01/MKCreative%26CulturalStrategy2018-2027MKCOM003.pdf)
- <https://www.investmiltonkeynes.co.uk/>
- <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/developingmk/planmk>

Stakeholders

- A selection of key stakeholder participants includes: My Milton Keynes, Hoteliers Association, Chamber of Commerce, Stadium MK, centre:MK, Milton Keynes Development Partnership, IF: Milton Keynes International Festival, The Parks Trust, Xscape.

Data sources which will be made available include:

- STEAM
- Hotel bed nights & hospitality data/profiling
- Attractions/events visitor numbers/attender profile
- Trade and operator data
- High Street footfall / profiling

- Audience Finder & Cultural Participation Monitor data
- Retail and Leisure Study Report
- CMK Live Venue Business Case (following appointment and in confidence)
- Cultural Infrastructure Plan (following appointment and in confidence)