

**Open Report on behalf of Executive Director for Environment and Economy**

Report to:	<b>Economic Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date:	<b>8 September 2015</b>
Subject:	<b>The Economic Value of Nature Tourism in Greater Lincolnshire</b>

**Summary:**

Nature tourism makes a significant contribution to Lincolnshire's economy. In the past the scale and scope of this contribution has not been fully recognised. This is changing now that the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (GL LEP) is seeking to maximise Lincolnshire's key economic strengths, including the potential for growth in the visitor economy through nature tourism.

In order to prioritise those aspects of nature tourism with best potential for developing the visitor economy in Lincolnshire the Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership (GLNP), of which the County Council is a founding partner, has commissioned independent expert research in this area. The research project will identify current and future potential values for the nature tourism sector as well as barriers and opportunities. This will promote practical joint working between public, private and voluntary sectors with the direct outcome of increasing nature tourism's contribution to the visitor economy as a whole.

The project will be launched at the Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership conference in November and Committee members are invited to attend.

**Actions Required:**

Members are asked to:

- i) Consider and comment on the scope and objectives of the 'Value of Nature Tourism' project
- ii) Consider recommending support for the project
- iii) Suggest delegates who may wish to attend the GLNP conference in November to hear the outputs of the research

## 1. Background

Lincolnshire welcomed more than 18 million visitors and residents to attractions generating £1.2 billion for the economy and supporting 18,688 FTEs jobs in 2013, and these figures will be far higher for 2015. Yet these do not represent the whole picture – many natural attractions do not count visitor numbers and are not included in these figures despite the large numbers that visit them. For example:

- Over 60,000 visitors to the seals at Donna Nook in November and December extend the season offering the opportunity to create value in quieter months
- The Lincolnshire Wolds Walking Festival brings 4,600 visitors to a different part of the County and is valued at over £500,000. It has proved such a successful concept it is now being trialled in the south of the county
- Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe Dunes National Nature Reserve supports over 26 FTE jobs and £845,000 in GVA, primarily through its 290,000 visitors per annum

Nature tourism\* is also a growth sector. The RSPB reserve at Frampton Marsh showed a 300% increase in employment following investment in visitor facilities. The reserve now supports 16 FTE jobs and has a total impact of over £1 million. This is corroborated with national research that finds the total GDP from the natural heritage tourism economy is £12.4 billion with total employment of 349,607; and it is forecast to grow strongly in the next 10 years (HLF, 2013, The Economic Impact of the UK Heritage Tourism Economy).

*\*nature tourism is tourism based on the natural attractions of an area. Examples include visiting nature reserves, birdwatching, photography, walking etc. (Tourism that encompasses an element of sustainability, e.g. eating locally, using public transport, not wasting water; is generally called eco tourism/sustainable tourism/green tourism.)*

Moving to consider nature, regular contact with nature, particularly at a young age, is shown to create an appreciation for the natural environment. Fostering this appreciation of the natural environment is crucial to ensuring its protection and enhancement both now and in the long term. Greater Lincolnshire has a diversity of natural assets but in order to retain the sense of place that brings our visitors, and keeps us staying locally we need to do a little more.

This sense of place will not just help the tourism economy but should help the wider economy too. There is an increasing body of evidence that higher quality places to live and work increase not only the draw to employers and employees but enable them to be more productive when they are working.

Bringing these areas of economy and nature together is a simple conceptual step, but it is one that is under-utilised at present. Members may recollect the 'Value of Nature' research paper prepared recently that outlined the broader benefits accruing to local communities from the Council's own investment in managing the natural environment. As a next step, the Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership is seeking to realise broader benefits from this investment, and that of other partner organisations.

The Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership (GLNP) is a partnership of 48 organisations across Greater Lincolnshire. The Partners include Lincolnshire County Council and almost all of the Districts, statutory agencies, Internal Drainage Boards and NGOs. Our role is to achieve more together than individual Partners can alone ([www.glnp.org.uk](http://www.glnp.org.uk)). The GLNP achieves this by adding value to existing initiatives, seeking to fill gaps and preventing duplication. There is a clear gap with nature and tourism and this is one area the GLNP is working to deliver on.

The GLNP Business Plan includes four areas for advocacy: agriculture, spatial planning, health and tourism. The vision for the tourism work area, which began this year is: *For the value of nature and nature tourism to be recognised and embedded within the wider tourism sector.*

As a first step, the GLNP seek to scope out the issues and develop solid evidence on which to base the steps for future work. In this way, an independent university with a background of work in this area has been contracted to research the value of nature tourism in Greater Lincolnshire. The research will further investigate potential future values of the nature tourism sector and opportunities and barriers for achieving this value.

The research will be concluded by autumn this year and launched at the GLNP conference in November (date to be confirmed). Members of the Economic Scrutiny Committee are welcome to attend the conference and suggestions are sought for other delegates who may be interested.

The research fills an important knowledge and marketing gap and will enable better decision making both at the policy level and for the individual small businesses that make up the majority of the sector. In the longer term it should also lead to better protection and management of the natural environment.

The opportunities and barriers presented in the final research will inform nature conservation, tourism and economic sectors providing practical recommendations for working together to increase the value of tourism revenue, while at the same time improving the quality and variety of the tourism offer.

## **2. Conclusion**

The 'Value of Nature Tourism' project undertaken by the GLNP presents an opportunity to better represent the full economic value of the assets and attractions that Greater Lincolnshire has to offer tourists and residents alike. From this baseline it is expected that significant economic growth can be achieved by the different sectors working together to implement the recommendations of the report. The GLNP would welcome support for this research project from the County Council.

## **3. Consultation**

**a) Policy Proofing Actions Required**

n/a

**4. Background Papers**

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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