The Supply of the Design and Development of a New Consumer Tourism and Travel Trade Website for North East England

January 2026

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1. Letter of Invitation

Invitation to Tender for the supply of the design and development of a new consumer tourism website for North East England.

NewcastleGateshead Initiative (NGI) is seeking to appoint a suitably experienced supplier to design, develop and launch a new consumer-facing tourism website for North East England.

This website will sit under a new destination consumer brand which is currently in development. Branding, domain name(s), logo and visual identity are not yet confirmed and will be shared with the successful supplier once the current research and brand development projects conclude.

The website will serve as a primary digital platform for both consumer and travel trade audiences**,** supporting inspiration, planning, booking and trade engagement, while delivering value to tourism and visitor economy partners across North East England.

Submissions must be submitted in the required format to **Lisa Kelly (lisa.kelly@ngi.org.uk)** and be returned by **Friday 6th February 2026** GMT. Any submissions received after this time will not be accepted.

We look forward to receiving your tender response.

2. Introduction

NGI invites bidders to submit a full written tender proposal. Shortlisted bidders may be invited to interview and demonstrate their proposed CMS, bookability functionality and approach to AI-driven personalisation.

2.1 Procurement Timescales

Activity	Date
Tender issued	Monday 19th Jan
Deadline for clarification questions	Wednesday 28th Jan
Clarification responses issued	Friday 30th Jan
Tender submission deadline	Friday 6th Feb
Evaluation and shortlisting	Friday 13th Feb
Supplier interviews	Wednesday 25th Feb
Contract award	Friday 27th Feb

2.2 Introduction to NewcastleGateshead Initiative

NewcastleGateshead Initiative (NGI) is a destination and inward investment agency whose mission is to inspire people to visit, live, learn, work and invest in Newcastle, Gateshead and the wider region. We exist to benefit local people, creating jobs, opportunities and a great place to live for current and future generations.

NGI leads destination marketing, inward investment, business tourism, and skills and careers activity, working in partnership with local authorities, Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs), regional DMOs, tourism and hospitality businesses, and national bodies including VisitEngland and VisitBritain.

As part of a wider programme of transformation, NGI will be transitioning to operate under the name *Experience North East England*. This change reflects a clearer, more unified focus on destination development and promotion, and aligns with national reforms to the visitor economy landscape.

This project forms a cornerstone of that transition. The new consumer tourism website will be the flagship digital platform, representing a step-change in how the region is presented to domestic and international audiences through a single, authoritative consumer brand and digital experience.

Until the transition is complete, NewcastleGateshead Initiative remains the contracting authority for this procurement.

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The Common Room, Neville Hall, Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 1SE

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2.3 Destination Overview

North East England is a diverse and distinctive visitor destination, combining historic cities, dramatic coastline and expansive countryside within a compact and well-connected region. The area offers a strong mix of heritage, culture, outdoor activity and contemporary city life, supported by a reputation for warmth, friendliness and authenticity.

When we refer to *North East England*, we are referring to the area covered by the North East Combined Authority – this is the area served by the seven local authority areas of **County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside** and **Sunderland**. This new consumer website focusses on these areas primarily, although our work may extend to neighbouring areas occasionally.
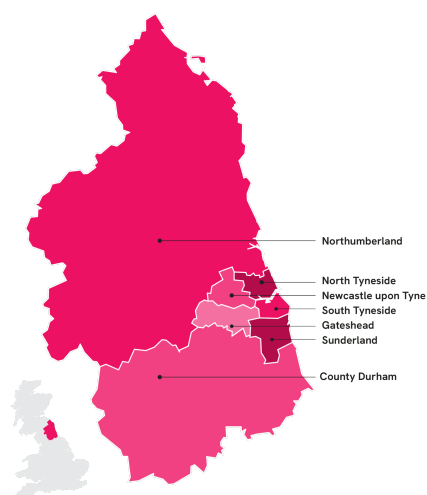
Graphic reproduced from https://www.northeast-ca.gov.uk/about

The region is anchored by the cities and urban areas of Newcastle, Durham and Sunderland, complemented by the towns, villages and landscapes of Northumberland & rural County Durham. Together, they offer a broad range of visitor experiences, from internationally recognised heritage such as Hadrian's Wall (a UNESCO World Heritage Site)**,** to large-scale cultural attractions including Alnwick Castle and Garden and Kynren**,** the UK's only live outdoor performance telling the story of Britain's history.

North East England's natural environment is a key strength, with a varied coastline, accessible beaches, and extensive opportunities for walking, cycling and active adventures. Northumberland National Park**,** home to the UK's largest Dark Sky Park, provides a unique rural and night-sky experience, while coastal destinations such as Tynemouth and South Shields offer traditional seaside appeal alongside contemporary food and leisure experiences.

The region also benefits from a strong food, drink and cultural offer, with independent businesses, markets, festivals, sport and nightlife playing an important role in the visitor experience. Accommodation ranges from city-centre hotels to coastal and countryside stays, supporting both short breaks and longer visits.

North East England appeals to a wide range of visitor motivations and markets and offers significant potential to increase dwell time, dispersal and year-round visitation through improved digital discovery, planning and booking tools.

2.4 Your Information and Data

All tender submissions will be handled in accordance with NGI's data protection policies and retained for audit and compliance purposes.

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3. Specification and Objectives

3.1 General Requirement and Background

NGI requires a supplier to design and develop a new digital platform for North East England that serves both consumer and travel trade audiences**.**

While the platform will play a key role in inspiring domestic and international visitors, it must also support the needs of travel trade users, including tour operators, group travel planners, media, and intermediaries, recognising the different content, functionality and user journeys required.

The platform must be flexible enough to present content differently depending on audience type, while remaining coherent and easy to manage.

The website must:

- Inspire domestic and international travel
- Support the full visitor journey
- Drive measurable commercial income and partner ROI
- Strengthen the legacy of the Destination Development Partnership (DDP)
- Be easy for NGI teams and partners to manage and scale without compromising design & end-user usability.
- Be fast, secure, reliable and optimised for global distribution across platforms and devices.
- Be built using stable, tested and trusted web technologies & frameworks
- Be optimised for both traditional search and AI agentic/generative search.

NGI anticipates that travel trade content will require a clearly defined and discoverable presence within the platform, which may include a dedicated trade area that is:

- Visibly accessible from the main site (for example via a primary navigation link), and
- Technically separated where appropriate to support content governance, tone of voice, SEO and access control.

Bidders are invited to propose the most appropriate approach, which may include (but is not limited to) the use of a dedicated subdomain, section or alternative architecture, provided it aligns with NGI's objectives and long-term digital strategy.

A high-quality, intuitive and flexible CMS**,** strong bookability**,** and commercial capability are non-negotiable requirements.

3.2 Aims

The aims of this project are to:

- Deliver a world-class digital experience that supports both consumer inspiration and travel trade engagement, reflecting the warmth, uniqueness and cultural offer of North East England.

- Position the platform as a trusted source of destination information for visitors and trade, supporting trip planning, itinerary development and promotion of the region.

- Strengthen the legacy of the Destination Development Partnership by building on its strategic pillars of product development, international market engagement and regenerative tourism.

- Generate sustainable income through digital innovation, commercial partnerships, affiliate ticketing, bookable experiences and advertising.

- Ensure full accessibility and inclusivity through compliance with WCAG 2.2 and advanced accessibility tools.

- Tailor experiences for key international markets through fully translated and culturally localised content.

- Lead with digital innovation by integrating AI to personalise content, enhance search, improve customer support and support data-informed decision-making

3.3 Objectives

NGI's objectives for this project include:

- **Launch a new, user-first consumer tourism website by Q4 2026** that reflects the warmth, diversity and distinctiveness of North East England and its Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs).
- **Position the website as the primary digital platform** for showcasing the region to both visitors and the travel trade, supporting increased visitation, longer overnight stays and wider geographic dispersal.
- **Showcase tourism, hospitality, cultural and visitor economy partners** in a way that supports consumer discovery and travel trade promotion, ensuring content is accurate, usable and easy to repurpose.
- **Support the full visitor journey**, from initial inspiration and trip planning through to booking and in-destination support, ensuring content is structured to guide users seamlessly through each stage.
- **Integrate a growing programme of bookable experiences, itineraries and planning tools**, supporting partners to bring new products to market and making it easier for visitors to plan and book their stay.

- **Achieve full compliance with WCAG 2.2 accessibility standards by launch**, and implement additional accessibility tools to ensure the website is inclusive and usable for all visitors.
- **Embed AI-driven functionality by Q4 2026** to enhance content discovery, personalise visitor journeys, improve digital visitor support and inform future content and campaign decisions.

3.4 Target Audiences

1. International Visitors (Primary Segment)

- Priority markets (TBC): Germany, France, Netherlands, Spain, GCC, US and Nordics. For more information you can access Visit Britain's Inbound Market data and insights here.
- Seek authentic UK experiences beyond London (Visit Britain's Experience Seeker segment)
- Require localised content and practical travel planning tools

2. Domestic Visitors (Secondary Segment)

- Short breaks, day trips and cultural experiences
- Value convenience, inspiration and personal recommendations
- Motivated by nature, heritage, food and drink, coast and countryside

3. Returning Visitors and Locals

- Repeat visitors, visiting friends and relatives, and residents
- Use the site for "what's on", insider tips and new openings

4. Travel Trade and Intermediaries

- Tour operators, group travel planners and intermediaries
- Media and content creators
- Require practical planning information, itineraries, product detail and assets
- Need confidence in accuracy, consistency and ease of reuse

NGI will provide updated VisitBritain audience segmentation when available.

3.5 Features and Functionality

The new consumer tourism website for North East England must deliver all expected core functionality of a modern destination platform. However, NGI's ambition is to go further, creating a digital experience that reflects the scale, diversity and character of the region, while matching the usability and sophistication users expect from leading consumer platforms in travel, retail and culture.

The website must be designed to support discovery across a large and varied geography, encourage longer stays and itinerary-led travel, and provide clear value to tourism and visitor economy partners. Bidders should demonstrate how their proposed solution will remain adaptable, scalable and future-ready, with the ability to evolve as the destination, brand and user needs develop.

Platform, Structure and Data

- The platform must be built around a highly usable Content Management System (CMS) that enables NGI teams to confidently manage the site day-to-day without reliance on developers or external teams. The CMS should support flexible, modular page construction and templated layouts, allowing content to be reused across editorial, campaign and product contexts while maintaining design consistency.

- The platform should support intelligent personalisation and optimisation, either natively or through integration, enabling NGI to tailor content and journeys based on user behaviour, location, referral source and intent. This includes the ability to test and refine content and layouts over time.

- The website must incorporate an AI-powered digital visitor assistant, embedded naturally within the user journey. This should support conversational trip planning, itinerary building and content discovery across multiple pages and content types, rather than existing as a standalone or isolated feature.

- The solution must enable the secure collection of first-party user data, with robust consent management in line with GDPR, supporting future development of insight-led marketing and personalisation. A comprehensive analytics framework is required, allowing NGI to understand user behaviour, content performance and partner visibility across the platform.

- Bidders should demonstrate how the CMS and underlying data structure can scale and expand to support multiple, distinct front end environments allowing content, listings and data to be shared, reused or syndicated efficiently where appropriate, should the need arise in future. While this shared-backend model is not required to be implemented at launch, the CMS must be capable of supporting multiple front ends, audiences or instances, and be designed in a way that avoids duplication, fragmentation or technical barriers to future expansion.

- o Bidders should demonstrate how their proposed CMS architecture would support:
  - ▪ Shared data models and taxonomies
  - ▪ Content reuse across multiple sites or platforms
  - ▪ Clear governance and permissions across organisations
  - ▪ Future integration with partner websites

  - o This requirement should be factored into technical architecture, data modelling and CMS selection from the outset.

- NGI anticipates that travel trade content will require a clearly defined and discoverable presence within the platform, which may include a dedicated trade area that is:

  - o Visibly accessible from the main site (for example via a primary navigation link)
  - o Technically separated where appropriate to support content governance, tone of voice, SEO and access control.
  - o Bidders are invited to propose the most appropriate approach, which may include (but is not limited to) the use of a dedicated subdomain, section or alternative architecture, provided it aligns with NGI's objectives and long-term digital strategy.

Content, Storytelling and Inspiration

- The website must support rich editorial storytelling that brings North East England to life for visitors. This includes destination guides, inspirational long-form content, seasonal campaigns and curated itineraries that highlight the region's cities, coast, countryside and cultural assets.

- Content must be structured using a clear and flexible taxonomy, enabling dynamic page creation and discovery through tagging by geography (e.g. towns, coastal areas, rural landscapes) and by theme or interest (e.g. culture, food and drink, outdoors, events). The platform should allow editorial content and practical listings to be presented together, helping users move seamlessly from inspiration to planning.

- Campaign and landing page functionality should allow NGI to rapidly create and manage targeted content for seasonal promotions, partner activity and priority themes, supported by integrated media, calls to action and data capture where appropriate.

Listings, Experiences and Events

- The website must support structured listings for accommodation, attractions, experiences, food and drink and events, presented in a way that is consistent, searchable and easy for users to navigate.

- Listings must include comprehensive information such as location, imagery, accessibility and sustainability attributes, booking links and nearby or related experiences. Schema markup should be implemented across listings to support strong

SEO and agentic AI search performance and content syndication.

- The platform must allow NGI to manage tiered partner visibility, including featured or promoted placements, while maintaining transparency and trust for users. Partners or approved contributors should be able to submit listings or events through managed workflows, with appropriate moderation and quality control.

- Event functionality must support time-based discovery (e.g. what's on this weekend or during school holidays) and geographic filtering, enabling users to plan trips around events and encouraging dispersal across the region.

Bookability, Partner Value and Visitor Spend

- A core requirement of the platform is the ability to support bookability and conversion, either directly or through third-party integrations. Users should be able to search for live availability, understand pricing and availability clearly, and complete bookings or referrals with minimal friction. Please see our existing bookable product website, New Adventures, for North East England which will eventually be replaced by the new regional consumer website for reference.

- The platform should support a mix of booking models, including affiliate links, embedded booking widgets and transport or experience partners.

- Advertising and sponsored content functionality should be available to support partner campaigns and priority promotion, with clear governance and labelling.

- The overall user experience should be designed to encourage longer stays, multi-day itineraries and increased visitor spend, while providing measurable value and visibility for partners across the region.

Accessibility, Trust and Compliance

- The website must achieve full WCAG 2.2 compliance by launch and integrate an advanced accessibility tool (such as ReciteMe or equivalent) to ensure the platform is inclusive and usable for all visitors.

- Robust cookie consent and privacy management tools must be implemented to meet GDPR and data protection requirements.

- Sponsored or paid-for content must be clearly identified to maintain trust and transparency.

- The CMS should support the display and provision of key accessibility information, accessibility features or access guides as noted in the VisitEngland Accessibility Toolkit on business and event listings and should include functionality that makes providing this information as seamless as possible for submitters.

Future-Readiness and Innovation

NGI is seeking a solution that can evolve over time. Bidders should demonstrate how their approach supports:

- Scaling content, partners and functionality as the destination grows
- Integration of new technologies and platforms as they mature
- A phased roadmap that balances innovation with usability, maintainability and long-term sustainability

Bidders are encouraged to highlight additional ideas or innovations that align with NGI's ambition to deliver a world-class visitor experience for North East England.

A full list of considered functionality is available in the appendix.

3.6 Content Management System (CMS) Requirements

The CMS is a critical success factor**.**

The CMS must:

- Be intuitive for non-technical users
- Support modular, reusable content, flexible layouts and page modification without compromising design, site performance or end-user usability.
- Enable campaign, seasonal and partner updates without developer input
- Support user roles, permissions and approval workflows
- Enable efficient management of bookable products and partner content

Training and knowledge transfer are mandatory, including documentation and handover to ensure NGI can operate independently.

The CMS must be capable of acting as a central content and data source, with the flexibility to feed multiple digital platforms over time.

Bidders should explain how the CMS could:

- Support additional websites or trade-specific front ends
- Allow different content views or permissions for consumer and trade audiences
- Scale regionally without significant redevelopment

3.7 Branding, Design and Build Guidelines

Branding for the consumer tourism website is currently in development and will be provided to the successful supplier once finalised.

Suppliers must demonstrate:

- Flexibility to work with a new brand, domain and visual identity
- Ability to interpret research-led brand positioning
- Experience delivering strong destination-led design

Design must be mobile-first, accessible and conversion-focused. Imagery will be made available via our Snapsea image library.

3.8 Integrations with Existing Systems

Suppliers must demonstrate the ability to integrate with NGI's existing digital ecosystem, including listings, booking platforms, analytics and partner systems.

Existing integrations that need to be replicated are:

- Data Thistle events API: https://api.datathistle.com
- Google Tag Manager
- GA4
- ReciteMe: https://reciteme.com/
- Google Adsense
- Get Your Guide
- Viator
- Fareharbor
- Boldest maps: https://www.boldest.io/

Integrations that would also be beneficial are:
- Open Table
- Transport bookings
- Google Places API
- Booking.com: https://developers.booking.com/api/index.html
- Expedia: https://developers.expediagroup.com/docs/

3.9 Future Readiness and Innovation

NGI requires AI-driven functionality to support:

- Personalised itinerary building
- Intelligent search and content recommendations

- Digital visitor assistance
- Insight generation to inform content and commercial strategy
- Content optimisation for traditional search engines and agentic/generative AI search to ensure content is visible in LLMs and agentic AI platforms like ChatGPT and Gemini.

Suppliers must demonstrate experience delivering or integrating AI solutions and confirm willingness to collaborate with third-party providers.

NGI is seeking a solution that supports long-term regional efficiency and collaboration, including the potential for shared systems and data across North East England's destination ecosystem.

Bidders should demonstrate how their approach avoids siloed solutions and supports a cohesive, scalable digital infrastructure**.**

3.10 Project Timeline

Target delivery: **Q4 2026**, including CMS training and internal readiness before public launch.

3.11 Deliverables

- New consumer tourism website for North East England
- Fully implemented CMS
- CMS training and documentation
- Bookable experience and affiliate integrations
- Partner tools and analytics
- Launch and post-launch support

3.12 Duration of Contract and Contract Value

Duration of Contract

The contract will comprise two elements:

1. Design, development and launch of the new consumer tourism website for North East England
2. Ongoing hosting, maintenance and support, to be provided under a separate arrangement

The initial term for ongoing hosting and maintenance will be 3 years, with the option to extend subject to performance, budget and funding.

Contract Value

Bidders are required to clearly separate costs as follows:

- One-off costs for the design, development and launch of the website (exclusive of VAT); and
- Indicative costs for ongoing hosting, maintenance and support, to be provided as an annual cost for each of the three years following launch (exclusive of VAT).

Indicative budgets for this procurement are:

- **Website design and build:** up to £100,000 (exclusive of VAT);
- **Ongoing hosting and maintenance:** bidders must provide an indicative annual cost for a three-year period (exclusive of VAT).

Bidders should clearly state what is included within the hosting and maintenance costs, including (but not limited to) support levels, updates, security, monitoring, training refreshers and service levels.

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4. Tender Proposal

4.1 Proposal Overview

Proposals must be sent to Lisa Kelly, Senior Digital Marketing Manager: lisa.kelly@ngi.org.uk by Friday 6th February 2026 at 5pm.

4.2 Written Proposal Brief

Bidders must respond under the following headings:

1. Capability and relevant experience
2. CMS usability, governance and training
3. Bookability, partner ROI and commercial income approach
4. Design and destination storytelling
5. AI capability and innovation
6. Future expansion to support additional destination websites
7. Methodology and project plan
8. Account management and delivery team
9. Pricing and value for money

4.3 Tender Evaluation and Assessment

The evaluation will assess bidders' ability to deliver a high-quality, sustainable solution that meets NGI's objectives, with particular emphasis on CMS usability, long-term operability, and the ability to support bookability and the visitor journey.

Evaluation Weighting

Criteria	Weighting
CMS usability, training and governance	25%
Quality of approach and delivery	40%
Bookability, partner visibility and visitor journey support	10%
AI capability and future readiness	5%
Value for money	20%
Total	100%

Notes:

- Submissions that fail to demonstrate a clear, usable and sustainable CMS approach may be excluded regardless of overall score.
- Shortlisted bidders may be invited to interview, including a live CMS and bookability demonstration, which may form part of the overall quality assessment.

5. Appendix

5.1 Full functionality considerations

Must-have functionality

- Full bookability and search (experiences and accommodation)
- Bookable itineraries
- Partner login area (content upload, analytics, profile management)
- Advertising functionality (sponsored listings, digital ad placements)
- ReciteMe (or equivalent) accessibility tool – WCAG 2.2 compliant
- CookieBot (or equivalent) consent management – GDPR compliant
- Event listings API integration (e.g. Data Thistle)
- AI-powered digital visitor assistant (chat-style trip support)
- Sustainability filters (eco-conscious travel planning)
- Affiliate integrations (transport, accommodation, experiences)
- Campaign landing page toolkit
- Tiered partner listings (featured/promoted placements)
- Newsletter sign-up and GDPR-compliant lead capture
- Snapsea integration
- Customisable search engine and agentic AI search optimisation at all content/taxonomy levels
- The CMS should support the display and provision of key accessibility information, accessibility features or access guides as noted in the VisitEngland Accessibility Toolkit: [VisitEngland Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Toolkit for Businesses | VisitBritain.org](#) on business and event listings and should include functionality that makes providing this information as seamless as possible for submitters

Should-have functionality

- Smart search with filters (interest, accessibility, family-friendly, coastal)
- Dynamic itinerary builder with drag-and-drop and AI suggestions
- Interactive mapping (experiences, itineraries, trails)
- AI content personalisation ("Suggested for you")
- Geo-location tools ("What's near me" in-destination)

Could-have functionality

- User accounts (save favourites, build trips, alerts)
- Augmented reality previews
- Gamified trails and challenges
- Visual search
- Voice search
- Cultural customisation of international content

- Real-time content updates (weather, transport, live events)
- Trip countdown and weather widgets