

Agenda Item No: 8

Report Title: Draft Lewes Tourism Strategy 2018-2021

Report To: Scrutiny **Date:** 18 January 2018

Cabinet Member: Councillor Tony Nicholson

Ward(s) Affected: All

Report By: Philip Evans, Director of Tourism and Enterprise

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Purpose of Report:

To update the Strategic Tourism Vision and Action Plan (2018 to 2021) and to recognise the opportunities for joint working for tourism services between Lewes DC and Eastbourne BC

Officers Recommendation(s):

- 1 To support the implementation of the updated Strategic Tourism Vision and Action Plan
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Reasons for Recommendations

- 1 To build on the success of the former three year Strategic Tourism Vision and Action Plan (2015-2018). This document is aimed to provide a summary of work priorities and is not intended to replace but rather to complement and update previous policies and to take into consideration the joint working arrangements within Council Departments that Lewes and Eastbourne have agreed.

Information

- 2 The Strategic Tourism Vision and Action Plan was published three years ago and it set out LDC plans to ensure the District remains a vibrant and attractive destination for future visitors. This Tourism Strategy, as well as building on the priorities already identified, will also act as an interim document that takes full account of the Joint Transformation process and its implications for the delivery of tourism services. It will seek to optimise the opportunities created through Eastbourne and Lewes working more closely together and supporting any areas of work that strengthen the local visitor economy either through the Tourism and

Enterprise (T and E) Department or working with other Council services that impact on tourism.

Priorities and Themes:

Six main priorities were identified in the former document and these have been used to help inform policies. A number of successful outcomes have been, or are continuing to be, achieved.

The Action Plan was built around the following themes:

2.1 Visitor Information Provision

How key information about the District's visitor offer is collected and disseminated to visitors and residents alike.

The joint management of Tourist Information Centres has been widely regarded as an improvement and the service has won first place in a regional tourism awards scheme. The five existing jointly-branded South Downs National Park (SDNPA) visitor information points continue to be successfully used across the district and this branding is being further rolled out in the Information Centres. The exterior of Lewes TIC has been re-painted for the 2017/18 season.

2.2 Online Destination Marketing

How the District and its tourism assets are promoted and marketed to both visitors and residents alike.

The 'Stay Lewes, Coast & Country' website has offered a low cost channel to market. This is now being augmented through joint promotion of Lewes assets through the 'Visit Eastbourne' site. Both authorities are members of 'Love Sussex' – a pan-Sussex visitor marketing portal.

2.3 Events & Attractions

How events and attractions can be effectively supported through the Council's position as a strategic leader.

Artwave and the Lewes Business Awards have gone from strength to strength with a new food and drink event that was launched at the end of September. A joint Eastbourne and Lewes walking festival to promote walking throughout the year was also launched in September with more walking weekends planned in 2018.

2.4 Local Business Engagement

How the Council can effectively engage with, and help support, the wider tourism industry.

By using the resources of Eastbourne's larger T and E team, Lewes tourism businesses now have access to a wider range of tourism support including advice on business development and getting a voice with

national tourism organisations such as VisitEngland, the Tourism Alliance and British Destinations.

2.5 Wider Partnerships

How the Council can effectively engage and work with strategic and tactical partners and stakeholders.

Lewes has engaged with county, regional and national agencies to raise its profile in areas such as television and filming locations, working with academic partners such as the University of Brighton and with thematic partnerships including the Greater Brighton Film Partnership and East Sussex Arts Partnership in the cultural sector. This work is expanding through joint representation with Eastbourne.

2.6 Research & Intelligence

How the Council can support the wider tourism industry through essential research and intelligence gathering.

Lewes has signed up to the East Sussex Tourism Data Warehouse project to help collate tourism data at a county-wide level and to support future bids for external funding.

2.7 Progress over the past 12 months

From 4th January 2017, the tourism, events and culture function within Economic Development was transferred to the Director of Tourism and Enterprise. One officer has been working one day a week at Eastbourne to integrate with the Tourism and Enterprise team and to act as a conduit for all Eastbourne T and E staff assigned work duties in Lewes. Existing events in Lewes such as the annual Business Awards and Artwave have been maintained.

The Artwave Festival is now in its 24th year. The possibility of adjoining an Eastbourne element of Artwave was considered for 2017 but it was decided not to follow through with this approach as it clashed with existing arrangements amongst the community arts sector in Eastbourne. However, the T and E team is now working towards joint promotion of arts and culture across both districts and to work with bigger partners such as Towner, Ditchling Museum and Glyndebourne.

The Lewes Business Awards were re-vamped for 2017, looking for a wider business and tourism remit with a view to expanding participation and income generation. This worked successfully and the event is looking to expand further in this area in 2018.

For the first time Lewes has hosted a 'Sussex Gin and Fizz' Festival in Southover Grange Gardens on 30th September. This was a ticketed event featuring live music, marquees and samples of local gin, sparkling wine and locally produced foods. The event attracted 1000 paying guests with traders reporting excellent returns and it is proposed that it will be expanded for future years.

Lewes DC offers a consumer-based website promoted as 'Stay Lewes Coast & Country'. The visitor website will be augmented with support from staff at EBC with some common design elements being used.

Through 2017/18 we will be looking at ways we can achieve greater digital integration between the two districts. The Lewes element of the 'Love Sussex' link will continue to be supported and opportunities to work more closely with external tourism organisations such as Tourism South East will be developed.

For the past 18 months, the Tourist Information Centres (TICs) in Lewes and Seaford have been given additional support. The TIC Manager at EBC will continue to lead both Lewes and Seaford TICs in developing their activities and in achieving higher income streams and expansion of their offer. Eastbourne TIC is also focusing on more Lewes District promotions and activities.

A Sustainable Tourism initiative is being developed in liaison with the University of Brighton. Future bids will be submitted to support the development of sustainable tourism based on walking, cycling and exploration of the District. The plan is to look at ways that public transport provision (principally rural bus services) can be supported through visitor promotions based on explorer routes and to create a network of routes that allow flexibility and connections for people visiting the area.

The District will continue to contribute to and play an active role in the East Sussex Tourism Data Warehouse working with TSE Research.

The relationship with major visitor attractions such as Glyndebourne, Ditchling Museum and Charleston will be strengthened, exploring the option of tourism packaging, now that legislation in this area is being reformed.

The gateway role of the Bluebell Railway to Lewes will be investigated with a view to partnerships and tie-ins with the operator.

The opportunity to work more closely with the South Downs National Park will be explored, linking in to both the sustainable tourism programme and SDNP tourism programmes, branding and promotions.

2.8 Next Steps

The six priorities and themes outlined earlier will continue to be applied over the next three-year period (2018-2021). In addition the following drivers will be incorporated into the themes outlined above:

- Share resources and integrate staff between the two authorities
This process has already started but there is opportunity to expand into other areas such as events and leisure provision

- Capitalise on the complementary visitor offer in Lewes and Eastbourne
Lewes incorporates historic towns, spectacular coastline and an attractive rural landscape including the National Park; Eastbourne has extensive accommodation supply but little room to develop further attractions. By promoting both districts jointly, there is scope to widen the visitor experience and to encourage longer dwell timers or repeat visits
- Establish greater connectivity to SDNP and 'National Park gateway' role
Lewes is a town uniquely within the National Park but there are other points within the district that act a gateway for visitors- joint branding opportunities with SDNP will be explored so that Lewes District becomes synonomous with being in the National Park
- Focus on Health and Well-being themes to develop new markets
This sector is rapidly growing and with the work already being led by Wave Leisure there is scope to incorporate Health and Wellbeing themes into wider generic tourism marketing, for example promoting healthy weekend breaks
- Exploit Lewes connection to food and drink offer
The food and drink offer both within the District and within its catchment area is extensive providing opportunities to promote local food and drink themes for events and to develop local supply chains for visitor providers
- Encourage greater use of public transport for visitor use
Whilst not everywhere in the district is well connected by public transport, there are key points which can be promoted for visitors to explore using both rail and bus connections
- Develop an 'explore' approach to visitor promotions to spread the benefits of visitor expenditure over a wider area
This policy will be aimed mainly at repeat visitors to encourage exploration of smaller settlements and villages where there are opportunities to benefit from visitor spend
- Develop closer ties with existing visitor attractions
There are several key attractions within the district that have an international visitor reputation but they tend to work independently from the Council- there is an opportunity to develop closer links and to explore concepts such as holiday 'packages' incorporating local accommodation and a visit to a major attraction
- Develop marketing drive through the wider use of social media
The use of social media continues to grow and is constantly evolving- this is one area where the expertise of the wider T and E team can be supplemented in Lewes
- Strengthen the Annual Events programme
The success of the events programme demonstrates that there is room for expansion, especially in the food and drink sector

- Develop Seaford - Eastbourne Coastal Link for future promotions
The frequent bus service between Eastbourne and Brighton already attracts many tourists- by working more closely with the operators there is the ability to expand the Seaford to Eastbourne walking routes for a variety of users

Integration and joint cooperation agreements are part of a dynamic process that contributes to the outcomes of teams promoting the joint attractiveness of Lewes and Eastbourne as visitor destinations. Visitors take little notice of political boundaries and see tourism products in an area as being simply things they can do, places they can visit or stay, and things that enable them to 'package' a holiday. The local authority role in destination management helps to maintain or to improve the quality of that experience. By building on the strengths of both Lewes and Eastbourne, we can help ensure that the visitor has a consistently good experience across both districts. The levels of service in areas such as tourist information, accommodation booking, events, entertainment, access to digital visitor services, itinerary planning and more will all be aided by tapping into joint staff resources and expertise. The contrasting nature of the two districts helps create a wider and more exciting offer for visitors, with greater choice and access to tourism services and experiences.

Supplementary business guides will be published over subsequent months to explain elements of this strategy to stakeholders and to encourage them to work with the T and E team accordingly.

3 Financial Appraisal

- 3.1** There are no direct implications of this report.
- 3.2** The council has a budget of £147,000 that pays for the Tourist Information Centre in Lewes as well as a presence in the Town Council Offices of Seaford and Peacehaven.
- 3.3** From time to time one off amounts have been approved as part of the budget setting process for particular events.
- 3.4** The budget will be reviewed as part of the budget setting process for 2018/19 onwards.

4 Legal Implications

- 4.1** There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

Lawyer consulted 26.10.17. Legal ref: 06813-LDC-OD.

5 Risk Management Implications

- 5.1** The changes/issues covered by this report are not significant terms of risk. No new risks will arise whether or not the recommendations are implemented or rejected.

6 Equality Screening

- 6.1** This Strategy is intended as a high level document and an Equality and Fairness Analysis is in development to ensure that implementation of the Strategy takes account of the impact on people protected under the Equality Act 2010. It will be presented to members of the Council's Working Group and representatives of protected groups in due course and their comments will be taken into consideration as the Strategy is implemented.

7 Background Papers

- 7.1** None

8 Appendices

- 8.1** None