

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date:** 1 July 2019

**Title:** Update on Tourism Activities for Lewes District

**Cabinet member:** Councillor Liz Boorman

**Ward(s):** All

**Purpose of report:** To update on the progress of the Strategic Tourism Vision and Action Plan (2018 to 2021) and activities that have taken place in 2018-19

**Decision type:** Non-key decision

**Officer recommendation(s):** (1) To approve continued implementation of the Strategic Tourism Vision and Action Plan (2018-2021)  
(2) To approve activities carried out to date

**Reasons for recommendations:** Building on the success of the former three year Strategic Tourism Vision and Action Plan (2015-2018) the 2018-2021 Plan has been implemented for its first year, including a range of new activities supported by additional funding of £100K pa.

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## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 Following a request from the Chair of Audit and Standards Committee in December 2018, it was agreed to provide an update on the progress of the Tourism Vision and Action Plan to Cabinet at a future date in 2019. This report is in response to that request.
- 1.2 The first Strategic Tourism Vision and Action Plan was published four years ago and it set out LDC plans to ensure that the District remains a vibrant and attractive destination for future visitors. Since the sharing of services with Eastbourne Borough Council was introduced through the Joint Transformation Programme, several areas of the tourism service were operated through a single team, including marketing and the provision of tourist information. The Strategic Tourism Vision and Action Plan (2018-21) built on the priorities already identified in the earlier Plan and acted to take full account of the Joint Transformation process and its implications for the delivery of tourism services.

- 1.3 Additional activities were also made possible through the injection of £100k pa to support much-needed modernisation of marketing platforms and to provide seed funding for new events in the District.

## **2 Proposal**

- 2.1 To support the continuing implementation of the Strategic Tourism Vision and Action Plan.

The Action Plan was built around the following themes:

### **Visitor Information Provision**

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

### **Online Destination Marketing**

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

### **Events & Attractions**

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

### **Local Business Engagement**

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

### **Wider Partnerships**

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

### **Research & Intelligence**

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

- 2.2 To approve the additional activities that have been introduced through the injection of £100K pa.

## **3 Outcome expected and performance management**

- 3.1 **Visitor Information Provision  
Lewes TIC**

Investment into the building using part of the £100K grant saw a refreshment in the customer area of the shop. New customer table and chairs were provided and the installation of a customer iPad that gives visitors the option to browse

the Visit Lewes website and allows us to translate into 92 languages tackling the language barrier faced by the high number of overseas visitors. There was also investment in new merchandise stands to free up wall space and increase the product offering with the aim to continue to be more commercial. Local marketing company Media Attention installed a digital screen into the Lewes TIC. The team is currently working with Facilities to explore the options to rent out office space in the empty rooms above the TIC and the pop-up shop in 2 Fisher Street. With many artists, makers and other businesses looking for space which is at a premium in Lewes, we see this as a good opportunity to make use of this available space.

### **Seaford TIC**

This also benefited from improvements from the grant to improve the look and feel of the TIC. With space limited inside the TIC, there has been a focus on the agency sales and other services on offer. This year Seaford Town Council has installed new beach huts that are available for daily and weekly hire. Seaford TIC now act as the organisers for these bookings.

### **Joint working**

The three TICs across Lewes and Eastbourne are run jointly with staff gaining detailed knowledge of both Districts and providing more flexible cover. One manager overseeing the three creates consistency, staff working between three sites better their knowledge of their surrounding areas, adds to their job variation, helps efficiency of rotas and allows the shared use of infrastructure.

## **3.2 Online Destination Marketing**

Previously, Lewes invested in online destination marketing through the Stay Lewes platform. Given that the scale of accommodation provision throughout the district is diverse and quite limited in terms of the hotel offer, it was decided to re-brand the online presence to Visit Lewes to provide a more generic marketing profile and to use a joint platform shared with Visit Eastbourne. The two brands are quite distinct from a visitor perspective and completely independent in terms of style but back-office functions are shared and there is obvious benefit in sharing purchase resources to negotiate a better deal with external IT providers.

Both Lewes and Eastbourne have different primary markets in terms of the types of visitor they attract but they are predominantly south-east focussed with majority of visitors coming from London and the Home Counties. Both Districts also have higher than average international visitors (compared to the region) but again, with different profiles. Online marketing enables more targeted promotions, higher conversion ratios and better capture of visitor data so it is envisaged that this will remain the primary source of marketing throughout the life of the Action Plan.

A launch event for the new Visit Lewes branding will be created in June.

### 3.3 **Events and Attractions**

#### **Artwave**

150 venues have signed up to be part of Artwave 2019, running from 17<sup>th</sup> August – 1<sup>st</sup> September. The team are in the process of curating a programme of headline events, including film screenings, workshops, and an art car boot fair. Charleston, Seaford Contemporary Illustrators & Printmakers, and the Newhaven Festival have all programmed events of their own to tie in with Artwave, strengthening the festival's grass roots, community spirit.

#### **Sussex Gin & Fizz Festival**

Building on the sell-out success of the last two summer festivals, we are running two sessions this year: a family friendly daytime session, and an over 18s only evening event. While the two sessions will increase the costs of producing the festival, it is hoped that the opportunity to double ticket sales will make it more profitable overall. 1800 tickets have gone on sale, with early birds selling out, and full price tickets continuing to sell well, with similar numbers of visitors for both sessions.

A new freelancer with excellent wine industry links is assisting with recruiting exhibitors and programming talks, and we've attracted several new participants this year. Two of the industry talks will be "in conversation with" events, featuring respected and well known experts including the CEOs of Brighton Gin and Breaky Bottom.

The festival is staying true to its original aim: to showcase high quality Sussex produce. Everything sold at the festival is made locally.

#### **Future Events**

After the success of last year's Winter Gin & Fizz event, plans are underway for a paid mini festival tying in with Lewes Late Night Shopping night. We are looking for a slightly bigger venue to accommodate the many people who wanted to visit but were unable to last time. We are also exploring the possibility of holding another Gin & Fizz event in different part of the District in the forthcoming year.

Going forward, we would like to develop the Lewes events / arts programme further, potentially with a new music event in Seaford.

#### **Local Business Engagement**

One of the advantages of the joint working arrangements is that Lewes can tap into the more extensive tourism support provision available in Eastbourne. For example, business enquiries, especially from SME businesses in the visitor economy, can be directed to staff in the tourism department who can either provide first-hand advice in areas such as marketing or promotion or signpost to the appropriate agency for tourism development enquiries.

On a more strategic level, the Tourism and Enterprise Department is engaged with larger tourism providers such as Charleston, to look at developing themes such as packaging and joint promotion of events and to bring attractions and accommodation providers together so that the benefits of overnight stays and day visits to attractions can be retained within both Districts rather than leaching further afield.

A major priority going forward is to look at joint working initiatives with the South Downs National Park, especially in terms of developing sustainable tourism, utilising local public transport provision and encouraging visitors to not use their cars to explore the area but to walk, cycle and use buses and trains as part of a more enjoyable experience. Local businesses are integral to any such initiatives.

### **Wider Partnerships**

Considerable progress has been made with the District more engaged on the local, regional and national level through a range of partnerships. For example, Lewes is now represented on the Biosphere Project which is exploring ways to develop tourism in especially sensitive natural areas which might otherwise be under threat through attracting more visitors, such as areas of chalk downland. By working with national and international partners, Lewes and Brighton are looking to improve visitor management policies that can help mitigate the damage that can occur through tourism.

Lewes has also participated in outlining national policy issues that affect the District through our associations with lobby organisations such as British Destinations and the Tourism Alliance. We have contributed to House of Lords investigations into the visitor economy and to policy papers on rural tourism and public transport issues.

We have a good working relationship with East Sussex County Council (ESCC), especially in the fields of cultural development and visitor research and intelligence and play a leading role in countywide groups based on these themes.

### **Research and Intelligence**

Lewes now participates in annual Cambridge Model 'volume and value' surveys and is a member of the East Sussex Tourism Data Warehouse run by Tourism SouthEast. More recently, we have been working with ESCC to appoint Acorn consultancy which specialises in the 'T-Stats' method of interpreting local and national tourism data to compile more accurate and timely visitor statistics, which can in turn assist with prioritising marketing spend and analysing the success of events.

## **4 Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Visit Lewes website impressions

## **5 Background papers**

The background papers used in compiling this report were as follows:

- None