



**The Potential Local  
Economic and Employment Impacts  
of Charleston in Lewes**

***by Marshall Regen Ltd***

**on behalf of**

**Lewes District Council**

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## Summary

Charleston in Lewes opened in September 2023. In its first 12 months, it welcomed 74,000 visitors, including 17,500 (24%) of paying visitors. Planned higher profile exhibitions are expected to significantly increase the proportion of paying visitors in future years. With Charleston's ambitions to develop the site into a high-profile National Bloomsbury Gallery, it is expected to be able to attract over 100,000 visitors per year, most of whom will be from outside the town.

A survey conducted in its first 12-months of operation found that nearly two-thirds (63%) of visitors to Charleston in Lewes combined their visit with other activities in Lewes and nearly half visited restaurants, bars, shops, markets, or other cultural venues in Lewes, spending money in the wider economy.

The table below shows the potential impacts of Charleston in Lewes over a five year period in nominal and present value terms<sup>1</sup>.

Central Scenario	Nominal	Present Value
Total Visitors	562,298	562,298
Total Benefits	£18,009,472	£16,803,763
Average Annual Benefits	£3,601,894	£3,360,753
Jobs Created	56	

Over a five-year period, Charleston in Lewes could attract over 560,000 visitors, generating an annual average of £3.6 million in economic benefits in nominal terms, and £3.4 million per year in Present Value terms.

The table below shows the potential impacts of Charleston in Lewes over a 25-year period in nominal and present value terms.

Central Scenario	Nominal	Present Value
Total Visitors	3,155,102	3,155,102
Total Benefits	£99,294,179	£67,105,690
Average Annual Benefits	£3,971,767	£2,684,228
Jobs Created	56	

Over a 25-year period, Charleston in Lewes could attract over 3.1 million visitors, generating an annual average of £4.0 million in economic benefits in nominal terms, and £2.7 million per year in Present Value terms.

There are significant uncertainties in the potential impacts, particularly over the longer term. The Low Scenario suggests that the annual economic benefit could be £2.4 million in nominal terms and £1.6 million in present value terms over a 25-year period, creating 37 jobs. The High Scenario suggests that the annual impacts over the same period could be £5.9 million and £3.7 million, respectively, creating 72 jobs.

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<sup>1</sup> Nominal terms refers to values without adjusting for inflation. Present value considers the true value, after considering time value. HM Treasury uses an annual discount rate of 3.5%. This means that £1.00 in today's money is worth £0.9662 next year; £0.9935 the following year; £0.9019 the year after that etc.

## 1. Introduction

In August 2024, Lewes District Council commissioned *Marshall Regen Ltd* to undertake a headline assessment of the potential economic and employment benefits to Lewes town of retaining Charleston in Lewes at Southover House, over a five and 25-year period. The findings from the assessment will be used to inform discussions between Charleston and Lewes District Council over the best way forward for Charleston in Lewes, and decisions by Lewes District Council on the future of Southover House.

## 2. Background and Context

Charleston House and Garden, in Firle, was the home and studio of the painters Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant and a gathering point for the Bloomsbury group. Today, it hosts a year-round programme of exhibitions, events and festivals, attracting over 65,000 visitors in 2022<sup>2</sup>, generating an income of over £3.4 million.

In September 2023, Charleston in Lewes opened at Southover House, previously occupied and still owned by Lewes District Council. It is a 3-minute walk from Lewes railway station and a ten minute walk from Cliffe High Street, along a flat route via Friars Walk. It is virtually opposite The Depot cinema and restaurant, a new local visitor attraction.

It was originally opened as an experimental ‘pop-up’ project in order to ‘test the hypothesis of a triangle of Bloomsbury-connected places’ - Charleston in Firle, Charleston in Lewes and Virginia Woolf’s Monk’s House (owned and operated by the National Trust) – and to establish interest and support from the local community for an arts centre in Lewes. It has the potential to provide all the additional arts and exhibition space that the charity needs for future growth.

Today, Charleston in Lewes comprises galleries, a shop and a café. In its inaugural season, it hosted two exhibitions – Bring No Clothes - Bloomsbury & Fashion and Jonathan Baldock and held a series of artist-led community projects and educational programmes.

In its 12-months, (September 2023 - September 2024), Charleston in Lewes attracted 74,000 visitors, including 17,500 ticketed visitors to exhibitions. This generated a gross income of £1,011,816. This included £174,600 in ticketing income; £129,380 from retailing; and £566,669 from fundraising. There was also additional income from catering.

The model that was used to inform the draft business case assumed that there would be 62,500 visitors to Charleston in Lewes in Year 1, rising to 87,500 in Year 3, but that 80% of these would be visitors to exhibitions, generating £266,538 in ticketed income in Year 1, rising to £373,154 in Year 3.

Whilst the Year 1 out-turn for overall visitors exceeds that set out in the business plan, the proportion of paying visitors (24%) was much lower. Retail revenue was broadly in line with forecasts (£121,083), but income from catering was well above the forecasts (£18,000). Other Year 1 forecast income, including for creative workspace, venue hire and exhibition tax relief, suggested direct income of £520,439, against an out-turn of £1,011,816 (including Fundraising) and £445,147 (excluding fundraising).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/revisit/revisit-charleston-in-firle-uk>

Charleston undertook a survey of 464 visitors to Charleston in Lewes in its first 12-months of operation. The key findings include: One in ten (10%) visitors were from Lewes town; 14% were from Brighton & Hove; a further 15% lived in BN postcodes; 3% were overseas visitors; and the remaining 58% were from elsewhere in the UK. Nearly two-thirds of visitors (63%) combined their visit with other activities in Lewes, including 48.5% who visited restaurants, bars, shops, markets and other cultural venues in the town.

Charleston has ambitious plans for Charleston in Lewes to house a National Bloomsbury Gallery, in partnership with Tate, V&A and National Portrait Gallery, which it believes has the potential to attract over 100,000 visitors per year, contributing around £4.3 million of additional visitor spend to the town. By bringing up to 100 of the Bloomsbury works back to Sussex, the charity believes that Charleston in Lewes has the potential to become a dynamic new learning and education centre delivering events and workshops, providing a programme of major modern and contemporary exhibitions. It could support the development of the town's vibrant creative economy, providing flexible workspaces and position Lewes as the national centre for Bloomsbury art, literature, craft and design.

### 3. Scope of the Assessment

This assessment shows the potential economic and employment impact of Charleston in Lewes in nominal and present value of benefits over a five-year and a twenty-five year period.

**Nominal Terms** refers to values without adjusting for inflation. **Present Value** considers the true value, after considering time value. HM Treasury uses an annual discount rate of 3.5%. This means that £1.00 in today's money is worth £0.9662 next year; £0.9935 the following year; £0.9019 the year after that etc.

The rationale for the 25-year assessment is that this is the potential term of the lease agreement between Charleston and Lewes District Council. However, the range of uncertainty increases as the appraisal period lengthens. It may, therefore, be more prudent to use Present Value benefits with an annual discount rate of 3.5%, rather than nominal benefits. We have also produced calculations for 'Low', 'Central' and 'High' Scenarios. Whilst the central case should be used as the most likely scenario, it is important to recognise that this fits within the 'low' and 'high' scenario ranges.

The assessment considers the following benefits:

- **Direct benefits** - ticketing income to Charleston in Lewes from exhibitions, retailing and food & beverage;
- **Indirect benefits** – benefits of spending by Charleston on goods and services in Lewes in the local economy;
- **Induced benefits** – spending by Charleston in Lewes staff in the local economy; and
- **Visitor benefits** – spending by visitors to Charleston in Lewes in the wider economy.

In addition, we have calculated the social, non-transactional benefits of the volunteering hours that are provided by Charleston in Lewes. The calculations do not include any non-transactional benefits from educational or community outreach work; cultural and well-being values associated with visiting galleries; or contingent values (Willingness to Pay) that are sometimes applied to assess the 'civic pride' economic calculations of cultural assets to local areas.

The assessment only considers the potential benefits of Southover House as the base for Charleston in Lewes. It does not consider alternative uses for the site, nor does it consider whether there are alternative sites for Charleston in Lewes. The report also deals with the potential economic impacts only. It does not address compliance or otherwise with UK subsidy control commitments.

## 4. Method and Assumptions

### All Visitors

We have used the 74,000 visitors, who visited Charleston in Lewes as the Low Scenario; the projections for 2024/25; 'median' (96,500) for the Central Scenario; and we have added the difference between the two to the Central Scenario for the High Scenario (119,000).

For the Low Scenario, we have assumed an annual increase of 3.83% over a five year period, followed by stable numbers of visitors (86,867), thereafter. This is half the average annual increase to Charleston Firle between 2015 and 2021<sup>3</sup>. For the Central Scenario we have applied an annual 7.66% annual increase for a five year period, followed by stable visitor numbers (129,640). This is the average annual increase to Charleston Firle between 2015 and 2021<sup>4</sup>. For the High Scenario, we have applied an annual of 11.5% for a five-year period, followed by stable visitor numbers (165,554).

### Paying Visitors

We have used the number of paying visitors to Charleston in Lewes in 2023/24 (17,500) as the baseline figure for the Low Scenario. For the Central Scenario, we have applied the forecast paying visitors for 2024/25 (36,500). For the High Scenario, we have added the difference between the Low and Central Scenarios to the Central Scenario (55,500). We have applied the same growth estimates that have been used for projecting the all Visitors numbers.

### Direct Employees

There is no data on the total number of full-time equivalent employees that are directly attributable to Charleston in Lewes. This is because overhead staffing is attributable to both sites. The total staffing budget for 2023/24 was £553,754. This includes £76,564 that is directly attributable to Charleston in Lewes and £553,754 that in 'Overhead Staffing Costs'. We have assumed that half of this (£276,877) is attributable to Charleston in Lewes. This makes the total staffing costs for Charleston in Lewes £353,441.

The median salary for employees in Lewes was £31,318 in 2022, uprated to £34,060 in 2024 prices. We have assumed on costs of 20%, which makes staffing costs per employee £40,872. On this basis, there were 8.6 FTE staff in 2023/24, based on 74,000 visitors. This equates to 1.165 FTE jobs per 10,000 visitors. We have applied this to the forecast visitor numbers to each of the scenarios to calculate the number of employees at Charleston in Lewes over the reference period.

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<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> ibid

## Indirect, Induced Visitor Spend Jobs

For each scenario, we have divided the total visitor spend by the spend per job in the visitor economy, uprated to 2024 (£47,762).<sup>5</sup> For indirect and induced spend jobs, we have divided the total revenue per job across the whole economy, uprated to 2024 prices<sup>6</sup>.

## Volunteer Hours

For all Scenario, we used the number of volunteer hours at Charleston in Lewes (1,312), as a percentage of visitors in 2023/24 (1.42%) and assumed a proportionate increase that is the same as the increase in visitor numbers for each scenario for a five-year period, with the number of volunteer hours staying constant thereafter.

## Direct Income

For the Central Scenario, we have assumed that the price of an exhibition ticket is £13.00 and that in 2025/26 the total additional income from other sources is the same as in 2023/24 (£798,632). Direct income increases by 7.66% (the average increase in visitor numbers at Charleston Firlle between 2015 and 2021) for a five year period. Following this, annual direct income remains constant at £1,881,010.

In the Low scenario, ticket income is based on £12.00 per ticket and whilst the income from other initial direct income is assumed to be the same as the Central Scenario, the annual increase is assumed to be 3.83% for a five year period – half the increase of the Central Scenario. Following this, annual direct income remains constant at £1,131,181.

In the High Scenario, ticket income is based on £14.00 per ticket and whilst the income from initial direct income is assumed to be the same as the Central Scenario, the annual increase is assumed to be 7.66% for a five-year period. Following this, annual direct income remains constant at £2,589,423.

## Indirect Benefits

The indirect benefits to Lewes have been derived from data supplied by Charleston. In 2023/24, £613,687 was spent by Charleston in Lewes on local goods and services. This works out as 63.1% of the direct income.

## Induced Benefits

Induced benefit is the spending by Charleston in Lewes' employees in the local economy. For each Scenario, we have used the assumed total number of FTE jobs and assumed that 50% of the staff live in Lewes town. We have then converted the average gross salary in 2024 prices (£34,060) costs to net salary (£28,043) using the gross to net salary calculator<sup>7</sup>. We have then applied the formula (82.3%) to calculate the total net salaries

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<sup>5</sup> Tourism South East's Economic Impact of Tourism – Lewes (2022),

<sup>6</sup> Analysis showing the count, employment and turnover (£'000s) of VAT and/or PAYE based enterprises in the United Kingdom for UK SIC 2007 Broad Industry Group; Office for National Statistics; 2018 (uprated to 2024)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.thesalarycalculator.co.uk/salary.php#google\\_vignette](https://www.thesalarycalculator.co.uk/salary.php#google_vignette)

of employees. We have then assumed that 46.2% of this is spent in the local economy<sup>8</sup>. The same approach has been adopted for all Scenarios.

### Volunteer Benefits

For each Scenario, we have multiplied the number of volunteer hours by £11.22, the hourly Living Wage in 2024. We have assumed no real terms increase in the 2024 Living Wage over the reference period.

### Spending Visitors

For each of the Scenarios, we have used the Charleston in Lewes Visitor Survey, which was conducted between November 2023 and August 2024. There were 464 respondents to the survey, although not all answered all questions. Of the 461 who gave responses 157 (36%) only visited Charleston in Lewes. These have been excluded from additional visitor spend calculations. Of the remaining 294 who participated in other activities in the town, 225 (48.5% of all visitors) visited shops, other cultural venues, markets, restaurants, cafes or bars. These have been counted as the visitors who spend in other parts of the local economy.

We have applied the proportion of visitors who spend in other parts of the town (48.5%) to the projected visitor numbers in each of the three scenarios.

For each scenario, we have used data from the *Tourism South East's Economic Impact of Tourism – Lewes (2022)*, to apportion the visitors into day visitors (82.3%) and staying visitors (17.7%) and applied the average spend per day (£16.58 in 2024 prices) to the day visitors and the average spend per night (£72.83 in 2024 prices) to the staying visitors. We have assumed that one night is attributable to Charleston in Lewes for staying visitors.

There is likely to be some double counting, as we have not removed the direct income on ticketing and the café and shop at Charleston in Lewes from the visitor spend calculations. However, it seems reasonable to assume that visitors who spend at both Charleston in Lewes and elsewhere will spend more than the average spend per visitor. Furthermore, although there are currently a small number of overseas visitors, if Charleston in Lewes develops an international reputation, this is likely to increase and result in higher expenditure. We have assumed that these countervailing factors will largely cancel each other out.

Visitor spending delivers further supply chain benefits. For Charleston in Lewes, this is accounted for in the Indirect Spending calculation. However, the spending in the wider economy also results in local multipliers. We have applied a 1.23 multiplier to the visitor spending, based on evidence from the *Tourism South East's Economic Impact of Tourism – Lewes study (2022)*.

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<sup>8</sup> Calculating Cost Per job – Best Practice Note; Homes & Communities Agency (now Homes England); 2015



## 5. The Economic & Employment Impacts

The following tables summarise the forecast economic and employment benefits of Charleston in Lewes remaining at Southover House over a five and 25-year period. They show the Central Scenario, followed by Low and High Scenarios, reflecting levels of uncertainty, particularly over the longer term.

### 5.1 Central Scenario

	Nominal		Present Value	
	5 Year	25 Year	5 Year	25 Year
<b>Total Visitors</b>	<b>562,298</b>	<b>3,155,102</b>	<b>562,298</b>	<b>3,155,102</b>
<b>TOTAL BENEFITS</b>	<b>£18,009,472</b>	<b>£99,294,179</b>	<b>£16,803,763</b>	<b>£67,105,690</b>
<i>Direct Benefits</i>	<i>£7,418,439</i>	<i>£44,779,504</i>	<i>£6,898,315</i>	<i>£29,979,502</i>
<i>Indirect &amp; Induced Benefits</i>	<i>£5,526,236</i>	<i>£32,996,872</i>	<i>£5,138,779</i>	<i>£22,115,566</i>
<i>Visitor Spending Benefits</i>	<i>£8,897,714</i>	<i>£49,9,846</i>	<i>£8,273,874</i>	<i>£33,681,137</i>
<i>Volunteer Benefits</i>	<i>£89,699</i>	<i>£503,307</i>	<i>£83,410</i>	<i>£339,543</i>
<b>ANNUAL AVERAGE BENEFITS</b>	<b>£3,601,894</b>	<b>£3,971,767</b>	<b>£3,360,753</b>	<b>£2,684,228</b>

In the Central Scenario, there would be over 560,000 visitors over a five year period and just under 3.2 million over a 25-year period. This averages 112,000 per year over a five year period and 126,000 per year over a 25-year period. In nominal terms, the total economic benefits to Lewes town would be just over £18 million over 5 years. Over 25 years, the benefits would be just over £99 million, or just under £4.0 million per year. Visitor spend in the wider economy accounts for just under £9.0 million over five years and just under £50.0 million over 25 years. This works out at an annual average of £1.8 million over five years, and just under £2.0 million over 25 years.

There are also benefits from local spending on goods and services by Charleston in Lewes (indirect benefits) and by staff employed at Charleston in Lewes (induced spending). The value provided by volunteering also delivers a modest economic benefit.

The preferred approach is to measure the impacts in Present Value (PV) terms, based on an annual 3.5% discount rate. This takes into account uncertainties over a longer timeframe. In PV terms, economic benefit to the town is calculated at £16.8 million over five years; and £67.1 million over 25 years. This equates to an annual average of just under £3.4 million over five years and just under £2.7 million over 25 years. In PV terms there would be £8.3 million of visitor spend over five years and £33.7 million over 25 years. This works out at an annual average of £1.7 million over five years, and just over £1.3 million over 25 years.

Charleston in Lewes will also create jobs, directly, indirectly and through additional visitor spend in the local economy. In the Central Scenario 56 jobs would be supported in the town, including 15 direct jobs, 35 jobs as a result of visitor spending in the wider economy, and 6 jobs as a result of spending in the local economy by Charleston in Lewes' and its staff.

## 5.2 Low Scenario

	Nominal		Present Value	
	5 Year	25 Year	5 Year	25 Year
<b>Total Visitors</b>	<b>399,447</b>	<b>2,119,535</b>	<b>399,447</b>	<b>2,119,535</b>
<b>TOTAL BENEFITS</b>	<b>£12,062,483</b>	<b>£60,566,536</b>	<b>£11,298,826</b>	<b>£41,335,661</b>
<i>Direct Benefits</i>	<i>£5,253,767</i>	<i>£27,877,379</i>	<i>£4,897,577</i>	<i>£18,907,575</i>
<i>Indirect &amp; Induced Benefits</i>	<i>£3,915,552</i>	<i>£20,776,581</i>	<i>£3,650,088</i>	<i>£14,091,524</i>
<i>Visitor Spending Benefits</i>	<i>£6,320,790</i>	<i>£33,539,184</i>	<i>£5,892,259</i>	<i>£22,747,642</i>
<i>Volunteer Benefits</i>	<i>£84,706</i>	<i>£449,464</i>	<i>£78,963</i>	<i>£304,845</i>
<b>ANNUAL AVERAGE BENEFITS</b>	<b>£2,412,497</b>	<b>£2,422,661</b>	<b>£2,259,765</b>	<b>£1,653,426</b>

In the Low Scenario, there would be 400,000 visitors over a five-year period and just over 2.1 million over a 25-year period. This averages 80,000 per year over a five year period and 85,000 per year over a 25-year period. In nominal terms, the total economic benefits to Lewes town would be just over £12 million over five year. Over 25 years, the benefits would be over £60 million, or £2.4 million per year. Visitor spend in the wider economy accounts for just under £6.3 million over five years and over £33.5 million over 25 years. This works out at an annual average of £1.3 million over five years, and just under £1.3 million over 25 years.

There are also benefits from local spending on goods and services by Charleston in Lewes (indirect benefits) and by staff employed at Charleston in Lewes (induced spending). The value provided by volunteering also delivers a modest economic benefit.

In PV terms, economic benefit to the town is calculated at £11.3 million over five years; and £41.3 million over 25 years. This equates to an annual average of £2.3 million over five years and £1.6 million over 25 years. In PV terms there would be £5.9 million of visitor spending in the wider economy over five years and £22.7 million over 25 years. This works out at an annual average of £1.2 million over five years, and just under £1.0 million over 25 years.

In the Low Scenario, 37 jobs would be supported in the town, including 10 direct jobs, 23 jobs as a result of visitor spending in the wider economy, and 4 jobs as a result of spending in the local economy by Charleston in Lewes' and its staff.

## 5.3 High Scenario

	Nominal		Present Value	
	5 Year	25 Year	5 Year	25 Year
<b>Total Visitors</b>	<b>713,837</b>	<b>4,024,923</b>	<b>713,837</b>	<b>4,024,923</b>
<b>TOTAL BENEFITS</b>	<b>£24,111,684</b>	<b>£137,214,913</b>	<b>£22,452,589</b>	<b>£92,453,372</b>
<i>Direct Benefits</i>	<i>£9,767,547</i>	<i>£61,257,996</i>	<i>£9,062,994</i>	<i>£40,885,722</i>
<i>Direct, Indirect &amp; Induced Benefits</i>	<i>£17,003,686</i>	<i>£105,957,874</i>	<i>£15,778,904</i>	<i>£70,761,570</i>
<i>Visitor Spending Benefits</i>	<i>£11,295,648</i>	<i>£63,689,747</i>	<i>£10,498,987</i>	<i>£42,944,788</i>
<i>Volunteer Benefits</i>	<i>£147,042</i>	<i>£825,064</i>	<i>£136,732</i>	<i>£556,608</i>
<b>ANNUAL AVERAGE BENEFITS</b>	<b>£4,822,337</b>	<b>£5,488,597</b>	<b>£4,490,518</b>	<b>£3,698,135</b>

In the High Scenario, there would be more than 700,000 visitors over a five-year period and just over 4.0 million over a 25-year period. This averages 140,000 per year over a five year period and 160,000 per year over a 25-year period. In nominal terms, the total economic benefits to Lewes town would be just over £24 over 5 years and £137 million over 25 years. This equates to an annual average of £4.8 million over five years and £5.5 million per year over 25 years. Visitor spend in the wider economy accounts for £11.3 million over five years and over £63.6 million over 25 years. This works out at an annual average of £2.3 million over five years, and just under £2.5 million over 25 years.

There are also benefits from local spending on goods and services by Charleston in Lewes (indirect benefits) and by staff employed at Charleston in Lewes (induced spending). The value provided by volunteering also delivers a modest economic benefit.

In PV terms, economic benefit to the town is calculated at £22.5 million over five years; and £92.5 million over 25 years. This equates to an annual average of £4.5 million over five years and £3.7 million over 25 years. In PV terms there would be £10.5 million of visitor spending in the wider economy over five years and £42.9 million over 25 years. This works out at an annual average of £2.1 million over five years, and just over £1.7 million over 25 years.

In the High Scenario 72 jobs would be supported in the town, including 19 direct jobs, 45 jobs as a result of visitor spending in the wider economy, and 8 jobs as a result of spending in the local economy by Charleston in Lewes' and its staff.

## 6. Summary and Conclusions

Charleston in Lewes is a new cultural venue in the town, located close to Lewes railway station and within easy walking distance of the town centre. The charity that operates the centre has ambitions for Charleston in Lewes to establish a National Bloomsbury Gallery, in partnership with Tate, V&A and National Portrait Gallery, with the potential to raise the town's cultural profile both nationally and internationally.

The extent to which Charleston in Lewes contributes the town's economy will depend on attracting visitors from elsewhere and encouraging them to combine their visits with other activities in Lewes, including shopping, eating and drinking. Survey evidence from its first year of operation suggests this has been successful. Developing Charleston in Lewes into a high profile venue could be expected to increase the volume of visitors to the town significantly. If Charleston in Lewes becomes a key part of a coordinated leisure and culture offer for the town, the benefits are likely to be strengthened beyond Charleston in Lewes, itself.

All economic appraisals are uncertain and are based on reasonable assumptions about costs and benefits. The longer the timeframe of the appraisal period, the more uncertain the calculations become. The central scenario suggests that there could be an overall benefit of £18 million over five years and £99 million over 25 years in nominal terms. In Present Value terms, the calculations are £17 million and £67 million respectively, with the 56 direct and indirect jobs created in the town's economy.

This is a reasonable starting point for informing discussions between Charleston and Lewes District Council about Charleston in Lewes' potential economic contribution to the town.

There are also likely to be qualitative well-being benefits that have not been calculated as part of this study. These include place-making benefits; health & well-being benefits through improving access and participation in arts and culture; and educational benefits, resulting from outreach programmes and community workshops at Charleston in Lewes.