

Report to	-	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date	-	29 April 2019
Report of	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Tourism Task and Finish Group – Recommendations

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) Cabinet be requested to approve the recommendations of the Tourism Task and Finish Group set out in Appendix 2 to this report;
 - 2) Cabinet be requested to recommend to Council that the draft Visitor Economy Chapter of the Economic Regeneration Strategy attached as Appendix 3 be approved and adopted; and
 - 3) the Tourism Task and Finish Group, having fulfilled its Terms of Reference, be dissolved.
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Head of Service: Ben Hook

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to present to Members the recommendations arising from the Tourism Task and Finish Group (TTFG) and to recommend a revised Tourism chapter of the Council's Economic Regeneration Strategy.

Background

2. The TTFG was established to review the Council's current activities in support of the local visitor economy and make recommendations as to future activity and spend. The Terms of Reference of the Group are attached as Appendix 1. The TTFG comprised of Councillors Mrs M.L. Barnes, Mrs D.C. Earl-Williams, S.D. Elford, G.F. Stevens and M.R. Watson and was chaired by Councillor K.P. Dixon.

Summary of meetings

3. The Group held six meetings between August 2018 and March 2019, with four meetings focusing on different aspects of the visitor economy. Partners, stakeholders and businesses were invited as appropriate to present to the Group and take part in the discussions. These can be summarised as follows:

15 August 2018: Setting of the work programme

19 September 2018: Budget Overview; Tourism Structures; and Characteristics of the Rother Visitor Economy and Future Trends

The TTFG received a written report on the economic impact of tourism to the district, and an overview of the current budget and how that is allocated; a written report on tourism structure and funding streams; and a presentation from Adam Bates of Blue Sail Consultancy.

25 October 2018: Tourism Marketing and Cultural Tourism

The TTFG received presentations from Natasha Williams of Battle Marketing Group; Jill Dain of Brochure Connect; Nigel Smith of Tourism South East; Sally Staples of East Sussex County Council; and Stewart Drew and Kevin Boorman representing 1066 Country Partnership. The TTFG also received a written report summarising the Council's current activity in relation to tourism marketing and information.

21 November 2018: Events

The TTFG received presentations from Howard Martin of HEM Events; Mandy Curtis of 18 Hours; Ian Bowden of Rye International Jazz Festival; Ed Firth of the De La Warr Pavilion; and Deborah Kenneally, Neighbourhood Services Manager concerning car parking policy in relation to events. The TTFG also received a written report relating to the Council's funding of events.

12 December 2018: Impact of the Sharing Economy and Visitor Accommodation

The TTFG received presentations from Hugh Davie of Strand House Guest Accommodation in Winchelsea; Richard Parker-Harding, Head of Service Environmental Health and Licensing; and David Marlow, Planning Policy Manager. Members also considered a written report on visitor accommodation within the district.

13 March 2019: Review of recommendations and draft Visitor Economy Chapter to the Economic Regeneration Strategy

4. Each meeting resulted in a number of recommendations coming forward. At its final meeting in March 2019 the TTFG reviewed and consolidated these recommendations and the final list of recommendations is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.
5. The TTFG was also tasked with updating the Tourism chapter of the Council's Economic Regeneration Strategy. This was considered having regard to the deliberations of the TTFG and the recommendations arising from these, and the draft chapter is attached as Appendix 3 for recommendation to Cabinet and Full Council.

Conclusion

6. The recommendations set out in Appendix 2 and the draft chapter attached in Appendix 3 take into account the changes that have taken place in the visitor economy over recent years; in particular the emergence of new technologies and the opportunities and challenges that this presents to the local visitor economy. They also acknowledge that the Council's capacity and priorities are of necessity shaped by the resources at its disposal; and that the Council must target its activity at those areas where it can have the greatest impact.

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director

Risk Assessment Statement

The draft recommendations and Visitor Economy chapter will ensure that the Council continues to support the visitor economy in the most appropriate and effective way, having regard to the nature of the local visitor economy and the resources at the Council's disposal.

TOURISM TASK AND FINISH GROUP**Terms of Reference****Aims and Origin**

- Within the Corporate Plan (2014 – 2021) there are a number of actions set out under the Core Aim ‘Sustainable Economic Prosperity’ relating to sustainable tourism and town centre improvement, of relevance these include:
 - successfully market 1066 Country accommodation and attractions.
 - support events which will increase visitors.
 - champion the world class aspirations of the De La Warr Pavilion.
 - promote Bexhill, Battle and Rye as places to visit.

Rother’s Economic Regeneration Strategy highlights the support the Council provides to the visitor economy through key activities that sit within the strategy:

- by promoting the area to visitors;
- by providing visitor information services that meet customer requirements;
- by maintaining and improving the range and quality of tourism offered, including attractions, accommodation and customer service;
- by aligning business development and support services with potential tourism growth areas;
- by working in partnership to develop new products and services.

Members have requested a review of the Council’s activity in support of the visitor economy in the light of the economic, social and technological changes that have occurred since the adoption of the Economic Regeneration Strategy.

Scope

The Task and Finish Group will produce a revised visitor economy chapter within the Economic Regeneration Strategy detailing how the Council can best use its resources to support and develop the tourism sector in the district and to create conditions for growth within the sector.

The suggested areas to be reviewed in detail include:

- a) Future opportunities and trends within the tourism sector
 - consideration as to how the Council and its partners will capitalise on new and emerging opportunities within the tourism sector.

- b) Marketing
 - 1066 Country.
 - cultural tourism offer.
 - brochure distribution service.
 - green tourism
- c) Events
 - review the current events policy.
- d) Visitor Accommodation
 - consider the opportunities and threats within the accommodation sector in Rother.

Approach

- a) Review the current support to the tourism sector including a summary of available visitor research across the district.
- b) Agree areas of work within the four areas identified above.
- c) Consult relevant identified partners and key stakeholders to inform discussions.
- d) Produce a draft revised visitor economy chapter within the Economic Regeneration Strategy.

Desired Outcomes

- a) Review and inform Rother's visitor economy chapter within the Economic Regeneration Strategy.
- b) Present a draft revised visitor economy chapter within the Economic Regeneration Strategy to Cabinet following the review.

Timescale

- Preliminary meeting and review – 15 August 2018.
- Four focused meetings:-
19 September 2018,
October, November and December 2018 – dates TBC.
- Analysis, draft strategy preparation – January - February 2019.
- Consideration of Draft Strategy – March 2019.
- Report back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 29 April 2019.

Membership

- Mrs M.L. Barnes, K.P. Dixon, Mrs D.C. Earl-Williams, S.D. Elford, G.F. Stevens and M.R. Watson.

Officer Lead

- Emma Wray, Regeneration & Tourism Officer.

Final Recommendations of the Tourism Task & Finish Group**Marketing:**

1. The Council enters into a three year funding agreement with the 1066 Country Partnership at the present level of £50,000 per annum, subject to a commitment to increasing private sector contributions year on year.
2. The Council's Lead Member for Public Realm, Culture and Tourism continues to work alongside officers to monitor the 1066 Country Partnership and contribute to monitoring and refreshing the Partnership's marketing strategy ensuring due consideration is paid to the highlighted markets.
3. The Council's Lead Member for Public Realm, Culture and Tourism to report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis on the performance of the 1066 Partnership.

Visitor Information:

4. The visitor information services contract be reviewed and a report and recommendations be brought to Overview and Scrutiny Committee by June 2020, in time to re-tender the service prior to expiry of the current contract in March 2021.
5. Officers explore the option to widen the procurement to encompass the whole of 1066 Country.

Research:

6. The Council, with Partners, continues to support visitor research to inform future decision making.

Accommodation:

7. Officers continue to work with developers and landowners to encourage the development of more serviced accommodation in the district, particularly in Bexhill, in accordance with Local Plan policies and Corporate Plan objectives.

Events:

8. The Council consolidates the visitor events funding into a single programme that is available to organisations and event promoters from across the whole of the district.
9. The current policy and guidelines for the allocation of event funding be revised as follows:
 - a) two bidding rounds of funding to be offered in each financial year, in March and September;
 - b) weightings to be introduced within a scoring system for funding applications, with a greater weighting awarded to those events planned for shoulder-season;

- c) Council funding to be awarded to event organisers who can show growth within their event to increase visitor numbers to the district and add to the local economy; and
- d) consideration be given to partnership funding for events from East Sussex County Council and / or from Parish and Town Councils.

The new arrangements to come into effect from 1 April 2020.

- 10. Council owned Car Parks should only be used as venues for events when it is considered absolutely necessary for the functioning of the event.

Strategic / Partnership Working:

- 11. The Council continues to work with local, regional and national partners to develop, deliver and promote tourism projects and programmes relating to the visitor economy and cultural tourism.
- 12. The Council to work with Skills East Sussex and local education providers to promote opportunities for careers in the tourism sector.

Budget and Funding:

- 13. Officers continue to explore opportunities to attract external funding in support of the visitor economy in recognition of a finite budget and pressures on the Council's finances. Any savings made within the tourism budget to be allocated back into tourism and directed towards events.
- 14. Consideration be given to increasing the tourism budget in future years by the rate of inflation.
- 15. The Chambers of Commerce in Battle, Bexhill and Rye, and any other interested parties, be invited to meet with the Lead Member for Public Realm, Culture and Tourism to explore their interest in developing Business Improvements Districts in their locality.

Sharing Economy:

- 16. The Council lobbies with partners for greater regulation of the sharing economy, with a preference for a self-regulating scheme.
- 17. The Council consider what resources would be required with the introduction of a statutory registration scheme for tourism accommodation, to be offset by registration charges and report back to the Licensing and General Purposes Committee.
- 18. The Council offers support to businesses to capitalise on new media platforms, including shared economy platforms and how to adapt and diversify their product with partners.
- 19. A promotional campaign to be developed to ensure tourism accommodation property owners are aware of their responsibilities and obligations.
- 20. The costs of business support and the promotional campaign to be met from the existing tourism budget.

21. The use of sharing economy platforms be acknowledged across the district through the 1066 Country campaign, but property owners be required to comply with legislation in order to register.

Draft Visitor Economy Chapter to the Council's Economic Regeneration Strategy

Support the visitor economy

Why?

The total value of tourism activity in Rother is £329.2 million, which supports over 5,500 full time jobs, equating to 29% of all jobs within the district. Tourism is a key contributor to the district's economic and social wellbeing. It supports businesses, both directly and indirectly, and has an interdependent relationship with a range of sectors, including farming, transport, retail, food and drink, arts and museums and culture.

Tourism helps to create a positive image for the district which encourages inward investment and provides a great place for locals to live and work.

How is this achieved?

- By effective promotion of the area to visitors.
- By the availability of good quality information that meets customer requirements.
- By maintaining and improving the range and quality of the tourism offer, including attractions, accommodation and customer service.
- By enabling a range of quality events and festivals throughout the year to attract visitors.
- By supporting businesses to take advantage of growth areas and new technologies.
- By working in partnership to develop new products and services, particularly those that use, protect and promote the natural environment.

Who else is involved?

- Private sector businesses, including accommodation providers, attractions and other service sector businesses, events promoters and organisers.
- Local Authorities including Hastings Borough Council, Wealden District Council, East Sussex County Council and other neighbouring authorities.
- Chambers of Commerce and other business representative organisations.
- Regional bodies, including Tourism South East, Visit Britain, Visit England, South East Local Enterprise Partnership and relevant sectorial sub groups.
- Cross-sector partnerships, including 1066 Country Marketing and other local marketing and tourism partnerships.

The Council's Role

As an advocate:

We will promote the importance of the tourism industry when representing Rother in policy discussions at regional and national level.

We will encourage growth in the number of high value-added visitors to Rother, in order to increase spend per head and maximise the benefit of visitors to the local economy.

We will continue to lobby for resources to support the development of the tourism sector, particularly around support for emerging sectors and trends in the digital environment.

We will help to raise awareness amongst peer-to-peer accommodation providers of their legal duties and liabilities when offering accommodation, especially in relation to fire safety and health and safety.

We will lobby, with partners, for greater regulation of peer-to-peer platforms that promote tourism accommodation (such as Airbnb), to protect consumers and ensure that regulations are applied consistently for all visitor accommodation providers.

We will lobby for greater awareness and uptake of careers in the tourism sector.

We will help support the tourism sector in understanding the implications of macro-economic forces driving changes in the visitor economy (such as new technologies, Brexit).

As a service provider and legislator:

We will continue to commission and fund visitor research to inform future decision making and service delivery and share information through our networks.

We will review the delivery of the Visitor Information Services provision in preparation for when the current contract expires in 2021, having regard to trends in visitor behaviour and requirements and the advances of digital technology and new media channels. Consideration will also be given to expanding the provision through working with partners.

We will offer support to businesses to capitalise on new media platforms, including shared economy platforms and how to adapt and diversify their product.

We will ensure that the Local Plan encourages the provision of new quality accommodation across the district with a focus on good quality serviced accommodation, particularly in central Bexhill.

In the absence of national regulatory controls, we will consider implementing a local self-regulating scheme for peer-to-peer accommodation providers in Rother.

We will continue to deliver or support related amenities such as car parks, parks and gardens, leisure facilities and museums; and we will continue to support the visitor economy through our statutory roles in Licensing, Planning, etc.

As a partner and enabler:

We will continue to support the 1066 Country Marketing Partnership through funding and officer time, and contribute to reviews of its marketing strategy. We will also press for more private sector funding to help support the 1066 Country campaign.

We will support, fund and promote visitor events and festivals that aim to bring in additional visitors from outside the district. Encouragement will be given to shoulder season events to help level out the seasonality of tourism in the area.

We will continue to work with national and regional partners and networks to develop, deliver and promote projects and programmes relating to the visitor economy, cultural tourism and nature tourism.

We will continue to work with local partnership groups and stakeholders who have a role in the promotion of the destination to visitors, where this activity is complementary to the 1066 Country campaign.

We will work with developers and landowners to encourage the development of more serviced accommodation in the district, in accordance with Local Plan policies and Corporate Plan objectives. We will also encourage the development of new non-traditional tourism products and services, including diversification of existing tourism businesses looking to respond to market changes. This could include the development of 'niche' holiday accommodation and existing businesses looking to diversify to capitalise on market trends.

We will encourage and support initiatives and attractions to increase visitor numbers, particularly staying visitors, where they support the objective to increase spend per head in the district.

We will maximise the use of external funding opportunities where appropriate to support the development and delivery of tourism projects and initiatives across the area.

As a deliverer of projects:

We will continue to deliver the actions and projects set out in the Council's Corporate Plan. Specific projects linked to tourism include:

- Coastal Environments, including improvements to East Parade, Bexhill.
- Development of a new leisure centre and related facilities at Bexhill.
- Economic Regeneration at Camber.
- Development of a Walking and Cycling Strategy.
- Combe Valley Countryside Park.

We will continue to develop and deliver other projects in support of the visitor economy as opportunities arise.