



Open Report on behalf of Andy Gutherson, Executive Director - Place

Report to:	Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee
Date:	28 February 2023
Subject:	Visitor Economy Update

Summary:

This report gives an update on the strategic activities that have been undertaken to support the development and resilience of the Visitor Economy sector. It shows the substantial progress has been made to promote Greater Lincolnshire to visitors and support for the businesses to evolve to meet consumer requirements. Activity to date has focused on developing green tourism credentials, nature tourism, business skill development and investor opportunities.

Actions Required:

The Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee is invited to:

- (1) Review and comment on the current progress to date and provide input to assist officers to plan and facilitate future Visitor Economy interventions.
- (2) Support the partnership approach to developing the Local Visitor Economy Partnership for Visit England endorsement and accreditation.

1. Background

LCC has been active in tourism since the early 1990s. *Our strategic objective has always been to increase the number of higher spending staying visitors to the county, and that remains the case today.*

LCC undertakes a strategic place leadership role, we inspire through our award-winning attractions; we provide a platform support for all visitor economy businesses (website entries, business support, development programmes); we actively undertake an attract and dispersal strategy to enhance the visitor experience for local, national and international audiences.

The Visitor Economy was particularly badly hit by the covid lockdown. With its strategic role the county council set up a Tourism Commission in 2020 representing all sizes of businesses within the sector to come up with a series of short- and medium-term recommendations of activity that would support businesses.

During the Covid Recovery process, £500k funds from the county council were allocated to deliver the Tourism Commission recommendations, which were categorised under Product Development, Investment, Skills, and Marketing.

2. Tourism Commission Activity to date

Product Development

The redeveloped www.visitlincolnshire.com goes from strength to strength. Good, relevant content is essential and we have added a number of new videos. One on Heckington Mill which highlights the work of its volunteers www.visitlincolnshire.com/things-to-do/windmill/ there are three videos on the Lincolnshire Archives www.visitlincolnshire.com/things-to-do/lincolnshire-archives/ Ancestral Tourism is a growing area and it is felt that visiting the archives for the first time is a daunting experience so the top tips video is particularly important. There is also a video on Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Visitor Centre, where we wanted to get across that this is not a museum, but a very different experience www.visitlincolnshire.com/things-to-do/battle-of-britain-memorial-flight-visitor-centre/ As new videos are added they can be used in our social media to direct traffic to the website.

Prior to lockdown, the tourism minister said that he thought we should major more on Lincolnshire's outdoor green offer. The tourism team didn't disagree and walking and cycling are particular strengths that are being worked on. Totally undersold however were the bird-watching opportunities in Lincolnshire and the team began working with the Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership, RSPB, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and Lincolnshire Bird Club – we provided the website, they provided the knowledge. Dividing the county into four 'birding' areas, it began with a coastal bird trail as it really shows the 'Rolls Royce' of Lincolnshire's birding offer, as good as anywhere in the UK. The experts identified the best places to go, what could be seen and when. There are two videos including another top tips www.visitlincolnshire.com/birdwatching/ The Coastal Bird Trail was launched to much interest at the Rutland Bird Fair.

A film location area has been put onto the website and this is an area that will be continually developed as it is a growing area of requests for information.

The team have improved the events area too as this is a strong driver of visits to the website.

In 2022 there were 430.5k website visits, 1.6m total page views. The average conversion rate of visitors clicking through to a booking link or for more information is around 16.5%

across the site which provides a strong indication that the website is performing very well for local tourism. Pages/Visit is significantly up on pre-pandemic figures and relative page views up by 1,585% on the same period 2019. Far greater user engagement with the new content and experience is proven with the 85% improvement on bounce rate.

Skills - Hospitable Boost and Hospitable Green

The tourism team undertook research into how businesses learnt best, some preferred a video, others a factsheet and some attending a course. A mixture was therefore used with the skills area featuring over 70 masterclass videos. Toolkits are popular and allow businesses to look at them in their own time at their own pace. There are toolkits on Green Tourism and Pub Development. Others are forthcoming on the planning process, developing packaged experiences and England's Coast Path. In 2022 there were over 7k website visits with 27.6k page views.

The Hospitable Boost support programme began in April 2022. The concept and content was a development from the "Hospitable You" series of masterclass videos, created for the skills area www.business.visitlincolnshire.com Over a four week period they discussed two video case studies (Brackenborough Hall, Tattershall Lakes Holiday Park) followed by 1-2-1 support, 1-2-few and 1-2-many masterclasses. Some 29 businesses received a total of 490 hours of support over the course of the programme and feedback from participants was excellent.

"The whole programme was fantastic. It made you think about your own business and its challenges. The masterclasses have been great and gave great tips to improve, what you do to ensure good customer service and having good processes in place."

Due to the success of the first programme, a second was commissioned, beginning mid-October 2022, for 20 businesses. It was done to the exact same model and there were three video case studies (Stokes Coffee, Ancaster Leisure and a self-catering business run by two accountants, who did a 'know your numbers' session). In total 300 hours of support were given to the businesses over the programme.

"It was brilliant and invaluable and really made me focus on what the business needed. It gave me a kick up the backside to make the changes we had been thinking about. I learnt so much it gave us a strategy and a plan, and we are excited about the future."

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In March 2022 a Green Tourism Toolkit was produced and placed on the business.visitlincolnshire website (7084 page views with 158 toolkit downloads). To help businesses develop this still further the team developed a programme called Hospitable Green, based on the above Boost model. Some 21 businesses are signed up to start on 10 January and the programme will run to early March. Many of the businesses signed up have already completed one of the Hospitable Boost programmes, a further endorsement that they have value.

Marketing

To promote the visitor website to consumers and to get businesses to use the business.visitlincolnshire area to develop their skills, we have undertaken a complete overhaul of our social media.

On VisitLincolnshire there are:

Total Followers: 29,053

Total Impressions: 2.38m

Total Interactions: 38.39k

During English Tourism Week a campaign was held with a short video each day on different Lincolnshire themes (food, outdoors, cathedral etc); this received 1.8m impressions and 2.12k click throughs.

On Business.VisitLincolnshire there are:

Total Followers: 670

Total Impressions: 452,19k

Total Interactions 2,212

Investment

The green tourism toolkit is a key part of our investment agenda as this will become an increasingly important part of the visitor decision making process. The tourism team are working closely with Team Lincolnshire on a Visitor Economy Investor Proposition and on promoting development sites for hotels and attractions. The team are also working with planning colleagues on a helpful guide to obtaining planning permission as this was highlighted by the Tourism Commission as an area of difficulty.

3. Future Focus

England's Coastal Path Toolkit: this path is due to complete in Lincolnshire in 2024/5 and it does offer significant opportunities to local businesses. Many parts of Britain which have completed sections have developed good business as a result. The toolkit will look at best practice elsewhere but advise on the steps that need to be gone through to set up luggage transfers and working in partnership with other businesses etc.

Ongoing Content Development: three more bird trails to achieve coverage of the whole of Greater Lincolnshire will be completed; further development of the film location service; diversity, accessibility, sustainability and experiences. Further improvement to the walks area making searching easier for visitors. Making Rivers More Welcoming is a new project developed by Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership and based on the success of the partnership working on the bird trails.

Partnership Working

LCC has a history of working in partnership on tourism. We are committed to support a destination management partnership i.e., Visit Lincoln as they transition to being a countywide organisation, Destination Lincolnshire.

The government has recently announced that it will pilot a new approach to tourism partnerships, the pilot is in the North East and the outcomes will help to shape future activity, where LVEP's will be established by 2025.

The structures are titled Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEP) and Destination Development Partnerships. LVEPs will need to write a destination management plan which sets out objectives and identifies how those objectives will be met.

Visit Lincoln have explained that the destination management plans will be co-created between Visit Lincoln and stakeholders in local government and business, and we welcome that approach. We have recommended that strong governance is wrapped around the production of the plan, with a governance board and an operations group. The government are keen to see an East Midlands partnership with county level partnerships (LVEPS) sitting beneath.

The destination management plan should set out who is best placed to deliver the various strands: likely to be marketing, investment, product development, and skills. In order for the partnership to work effectively it will need a range of partners to deliver against a programme which is co-ordinated by the LVEP secretariat -similar to the way that the LEP works. Each organisation that is involved in delivering tourism activity recognises that they don't have the necessary skills and capacity to lead everything, and we are all committed to jointly supporting the LVEP process and continuing our work to support the sector.

4. Conclusion

The work we have delivered to date and the strategic role we undertake will enable us to continue to develop the sector and to increase the number of high spending staying visitors to the county, focusing on our strengths of our city, coast and countryside. We are committed to working in partnership with Destination Lincolnshire and see that the Local Visitor Economy Partnership development process and future accreditation as an enhancement of our support to the Visitor Economy Sector.

The Environment and Scrutiny Committee are invited to review and endorse the activity to date and the proposed future plans.

5. Consultation

The Tourism Commission, comprised of public sector representatives and a group of businesses, of different sizes and geographical spread (it included Visit Lincoln and District Tourism Officer's).

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/A

6. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Mary Powell, Place & Investment Manager, who can be contacted on 07770 435606 or mary.powell@lincolnshire.gov.uk.