VisitLincolnshire
city · countryside · coast

2024 Website Strategy
visitlincolnshire.com

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1. Introduction

Visit Lincolnshire is the visitor facing destination website for Greater Lincolnshire owned and managed by Lincolnshire County Council. The website sets the scene, brand values, and visitor expectations of the county. A beautifully curated shop window enticing you to visit and explore.

We **showcase** the best of Lincolnshire as a whole and then signpost visitors to more localised sites.

This is our **attract** and **disperse** strategy.

The website is well on track to hit **2 million pages views** for 2023, and we have a global audience.

We **inspire** tourists to visit and **inform** them of what to do when they get here.

It makes planning a visit to Lincolnshire **easy, accessible, and bookable.**

2. Website Background

Lincolnshire County Council (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, this includes local, national and international visitors.

We have had periods where we invested heavily in promotion of city, coast and countryside, in product development, and now after the Covid lockdowns our investment is in supporting businesses and in high level promotion. Fundamentally, business support and promotion retains that strategic objective of increasing the number of higher-spending visitors to the county.

The website has always had a gateway role, inspiring and attracting, and then encouraging website visitors to relevant local websites. As LCC, we are of course, a tourism operator in our own right with heritage and countryside assets.

There is a history of three unsuccessful attempts since 2010 to give third party operators the chance to manage the website on our behalf, so there is a huge risk attached to asking any other operator to run the site. In 2020 as the pandemic took hold, we knew we needed a website that would both Inspire and Inform. Considerable investment was made in the new website which LCC is now running, with support from our web builder on SEO and it is outperforming all previous attempts. Our preferred approach therefore is for LCC to continue to manage the website, and to create a small reference group, led by LCC to set the direction and content of the site. The team live and breathe the site, it's the cornerstone of our visitor facing communications and is continually tweaked, updated and championed.

A Tourism Commission Output

During lockdown the LCC Visitor Economy Team continued to provide a strategic steer and set up a Tourism Commission (TC) which included the existing Destination Management Organisation (DMO) and visitor economy businesses of varying sizes, types and geographical spread. The aim was to come up with a series of recommendations of short and medium term that those businesses felt were most needed in the circumstances. LCC business recovery funds were then allocated to deliver those recommendations focusing on Product Development, Skills, Marketing & PR and Infrastructure.

Through the Tourism Commission work, LCC has completely redeveloped www.visitlincolnshire.com . We have run successful programmes called Hospitable Boost and Hospitable Green and have developed a Green Tourism Toolkit to help ensure that the visitor economy businesses are equipped with the skills and resources to enhance their resilience, sustainability and survival.

The website runs on the latest version of the platform Wordpress, version 6.3.1 (as at Dec 2023), and the Elemental content building system.

What problems are we trying to solve?

- Lincolnshire is not on people's list to visit – therefore they don't know to look for the website
- Lack of awareness, no perception of Lincolnshire (either good or bad)
- People think it's flat and boring
- People want what Lincolnshire has, they're just oblivious that we've got it.

- Not enough accommodation; not enough quality or branded accommodation
- Perception that our offer for families is not good enough
- Food offer often not very sophisticated, of quality or on trend
- No perception of where the county is or how to get to it.

2022 research shows that in a three word cloud, that positively and overwhelmingly Lincolnshire is **Friendly, Historic and Peaceful.** Other positives were Quiet, Pretty, Calm, Old, **Safe**, Rural, Happy.

Some less positive words used (in much smaller numbers) were that the county is **Underwhelming, Boring and Outdated**.

Regarding the statement that information about the area was "easy to find and access" - 26% completely agreed, 45% agreed to some extent. Therefore 71% of the respondents thought that information was easy to find and access to some extent.

28% of respondents disagreed with the statement.

The 2022 research also said that 93% of visitors were repeat visitors. Although there may be some lockdown bias with this figure being so high, Lincolnshire has always been known for its loyal repeat visitor figures. This is both a strength and a weakness. The positive is that once we get visitors to Lincolnshire they like it and want to return; negatively we're not attracting enough new visitors, making us perhaps overly dependent on our repeat visitors.

3. Our strategic objectives for the Website

- That it is the first port of call for visitor information on Lincolnshire
- That it maintains its position in top two of search engines
- That it presents a beautifully curated view of the county
- That it attracts and increases the number of higher spending staying visitors to the county
- It is honest and helpful and we are proud of it. Authentic.
- That it is easy and simple to find what you're looking for and to make a booking
- That it is as useful in the pre-planning stage as it is when the visitor arrives
- That new quality content is constantly being added and repurposed
- Through segmentation we encourage people to find what interests them
- That it brings business to the Lincolnshire Visitor Economy, including retail and leisure
- That our partners will want to work with us because the website delivers as proven by its analytics
- We link and add value to partner / districts sites and aim that this is reciprocated.
- Used by external and internal visitors and residents.

Lincolnshire: Product Positioning & The Power of Three

City, Coast and Countryside - maybe not unique to Lincolnshire, but it is a simple shorthand and jump-off point.

Countryside

Lincolnshire is very rural, in parts very traditional and perhaps a slower pace of life. The rolling hills of the Wolds, the flat Fens with its big skies and the Lincoln Edge, a continuation of the Cotswolds and sharing many similarities. Walk the Viking Way to cover it all.

Lincolnshire's heritage includes charming market towns and medieval villages. There are castles, country houses, museums, aviation heritage and working windmills. All in the friendliest and most peaceful of settings.

City

A beautiful historic city full of heritage and culture - home to the magnificent Lincoln Cathedral and Castle, ancient walls, and medieval architecture. It is no wonder that Lincoln is a popular location for a city break in the UK. Wander along the picturesque, cobbled streets and take in the spectacular sights of Lincoln's historic architecture. The city is full of fun attractions and activities for the whole family to enjoy plus lots of delicious places to eat and drink.

Though steeped in history and home to magnificent architecture – Lincoln also has a younger, vibrant, exciting side. Welcoming thousands of students each year into its relatively new, but already award-winning university. Student culture pulses through the very veins of our historic city.

Coast

A perfect blend of traditional seaside resorts and a beautiful natural coastline.

Lincolnshire is the proud home to some of the greatest traditional English seaside resorts in the country with Skegness, Cleethorpes and Mablethorpe. You'll find plenty of things to do, places to visit and fun-filled activities and attractions to entertain the whole family.

For those in search of a relaxing coastal stroll, look no further than Lincolnshire's Natural Coast. Free in every sense, Lincolnshire's Natural Coast offers miles of clean wide sandy beaches away from the bustle of the holiday resorts. Walking, cycling, bird watching or just soak up the wide open spaces.

City
With attractions including one of Europe's finest Gothic cathedrals, the City of Lincoln is a showcase for English history.

Coast
Greater Lincolnshire offers vast spaces for nature tourism as well as traditional seaside resorts.

Countryside
Greater Lincolnshire's rural areas present a wealth of opportunities for walking, cycling, horse riding and nature study.

Our Vision for the website:

A beautifully curated, expertly delivered, online platform that adds value to all Lincolnshire businesses by inspiring and attracting consumers to our product offer; and converting them to purchase / consume; and extend their stay.

Our Tone of Voice remains true to brand values – authentic, trustworthy, quality.

Non hyperbolic

VisitLincolnshire.com…..

…..is THE go to, top of mind, *fully accessible* destination website for Greater Lincolnshire.

…..represents the very best of Lincolnshire online.

…..showcases the county to millions of potential visitors and inspires them to come here.

…..informs and focuses the visitor – creating product awareness and inspiring purchase / consumption intent.

…..is a first point of contact for the trade / industry contacts

Visit Lincolnshire is the visitor facing brand that visitors recognize, owned and managed by Lincolnshire County Council.

The Visit Lincolnshire website is the website that all our guests and visitors see when they type into a search engine, for example, "holiday in Lincolnshire", "I want to visit Lincolnshire", "things to do in Lincolnshire" etc.   It is a high performing site.

It sets the scene, entices and inspires people to visit - and then importantly points them to further information on specific destination websites - for example Visit Lincs Coast, Visit Lincoln, Love Lincs Wolds, Discover NE Lincs etc, or individual business websites.

Visit Lincolnshire (and therefore LCC) collaborate with ALL district tourism officers, and the LVEP Destination Lincolnshire, to publish visitor information for our county-wide destination website.

To avoid confusion Destination Lincolnshire is a community interest company. The Destination Lincolnshire brand is not visitor facing. As well as being a membership organisation, they are also an LVEP (Local Visitor Economy Partnership); and therefore have a contract to represent the county to Visit England. Destination Lincolnshire do also own and operate visitor facing brands, such as Visit Lincoln, but importantly Destination Lincolnshire itself is a business brand.

Behind the scenes, all of the agencies and stakeholders involved in county tourism collaborate and work together to amplify and champion Lincolnshire as a great place to visit. There is a big job to do and room for all. It doesn't matter at which point a business enter this support eco-system, we work together to signpost and introduce them to the most suitable solution.

Our Mission…

Is two fold: **Inspire and Inform. Attract and Disperse.**

In a visitor landscape where customers have little preconceived perception of Lincolnshire – Visit Lincolnshire sets the scene, brand values, and expectations of the county. A beautifully curated shop window.

Our Aims:

Raise awareness of Lincolnshire as a visitor destination - therefore

Increasing the volume of visitors and the **value** of visitor spend

Our (macro) Objectives being that visitors:

Are Welcome.....Inspire a purchase decision to visit Lincolnshire (trial and pipeline)

Stay... convert day to overnight stay

More people stay.... DEI, widen demographics

Stay longer …...trip duration and seasonality / extend season

Spend more..... increase value and volume of product, up sell and cross promote

Return......repeat purchase

Refer.....testimonials and advocacy, social proof

Our (micro) objectives:

Drive eye balls to the website

Keep visitors on the site (sticky content) and then disperse (convert)

Bring visitors back to the website

How will we achieve this:

Content Creation – rich, engaging, inspiring content, editorial and visitor centric.

Visitor Experience – intuitive and sticky.

Product Showcase – and increasing product listings.

Widening Reach – audience targeting and segmentation including all digital marketing.

Maximising SEO – A hard working, optimised and localised site attracting visitors organically.

Review, monitoring and evaluation of objectives.

Implement Maximising Outputs process.

4. Analytics

2023

www.visitlincolnshire.com (VLS) has seen excellent growth in 2023. The website has achieved an increase in user traffic up 61% in 2023 compared to 2022. Search engine optimization is excellent and it appears first or second in most searches.

The website saw 1,257,024 page views Jan-Dec 2023. Page views peaked in August with 167,216 during the height of the summer period, coinciding with the school summer holidays.

This success can be attributed to the optimised and continuously added/updated event pages. The introduction of this strategy to support the existing Things To Do listings has vastly boosted value and interest in the website.

Optimised pages for popular attractions and destinations such as Stamford also direct a significant amount of constant traffic to the website. The average conversion rate of visitors clicking through to a booking link or for more information is around 19.3% across the site and has been at that level for the last two quarters of 2023. This figure has consistently been at a healthy 13-15% since 2021. The rise in this figure is pleasing and shows that www.visitlincolnshire.com is delivering business and providing the potential visitor with what they want.

95% of all traffic is from across the UK, with 4% from the Lincoln area and 35% from the London area. Top four overseas countries are USA, Australia, Netherlands and France.

5. Content and Brand Values

- We Inspire and Inform
- Our brand is strong, valuable and must be protected at all cost. It represents a huge amount of equity and we should never muddy the waters.
- Photographically beautiful – lovely presentation to challenge the non-perception of Lincolnshire and people not knowing what we are and what we've got.
- Ease of Use – clearly and thoughtfully presented, we curate the information so you slip easily from an area or attraction to accommodation booking and places to eat. You're presented with a whole offer.
- Tone – should be friendly (see 2022 word cloud). See example below - conversational
- Honest – we don't over-sell, the reality has to match what is promised. Lincolnshire won't be for everybody – our ideal should be to match our visitors with what they want.
- 'Community' of businesses and how we take them with us
- How does Lincolnshire reflect on you, the visitor? You talk about your holiday to your friends and you want it to reflect well on you. Aspirational
- Special, insider knowledge

Tone Example – taken from Birding in the Wolds

Louth Lud Valley Birdwatching - Visit Lincolnshire

This copy was written by Lincolnshire Bird Club. It's engaging and helpful, expert but not patronising and doesn't present birdwatching as not for you. Insider tips are very appealing: a pub to go for a drink, a good café, advice on seeing a particular bird. But all managed in a relatively low word count. The Bird Trails work to a template, so that authorship across the Bird Trail family can be in many hands (RSPB, LWT, NT, LBC) but works overall with the same tone. It should feel like a friend has been and is giving you advice on where to go. Should not be over-familiar, gushing or cloying.

"It's easiest to park in a town centre car park and walk to Westgate Fields along Westgate, checking out the church spire for peregrine as you go past, and on your way back. At Westgate Fields walk along the river side and watch the river and small mill lake for teal, gadwall, kingfisher and grey wagtail. A little further on the alder trees around the river provide great winter feeding for tit and finch flocks and are worth scrutinising for siskin, redpoll, treecreeper and nuthatch though goldfinch and chaffinch are much commoner. At the far end of Westgate Fields turn right and walk along the river to Hubbards Hills. At the entrance there are toilets, a car park and a delightful café which remains true to its Edwardian roots. The farmhouse adjacent has a front garden feeding station which is great for nuthatch and stock dove. The lake in Hubbards Hills is always worth a look for mainly mallard and moorhen but also mandarin occasionally and grey wagtail regularly. Walk to the far end of the hills along the river and choose to walk back up the stairs to the left along the top of the valley or explore the footpaths into the Wolds further around Hallington and Raithby. Return back the way you came and perhaps stop off at the Wheatsheaf Pub at the church end of Westgate where you can sit outside at the back with a well earned pint and watch for peregrines. Peak time is February to July but they are present all year round."

Templating is key to new areas: keeps content beautiful; simple but helpful; ease of use; not messy or random.

Developing Future Content

Our content must always be beautifully presented and curated.

It must also be underpinned by market researched, 'visitor first' understanding. What gap in the market is this content filling / serving? How can we demonstrate this, and understand return on investment.

- Monetising can dilute the brand, so care needs to be taken.
- Importance of the analytics
- We shouldn't be afraid of doing some controlled testing on an area of the site – even if it fails we will learn from it.

Corner stone content

Cornerstones: Now and evolving

Nature Tourism – walking, England Coastal Path (KCIIIECP), Viking Way, reserves, bird watching, sustainability, dark skies, rewilding, glorious beaches

Engaged and Activated – tours, trails, experiences, itineraries, stories to tell and places to be.

Heritage and Culture – special sites, world class immersion and interpretation, exhibitions, challenging perceptions, quality food culture, roaring skies and aviation pride.

Nature Tourism: continue to develop the content on Walking, Cycling, Bird-watching and Nature Reserves including developing projects; but then draw it together under a Nature Tourism umbrella.

- Finish birdwatching trails, Coast and Wolds trails complete, Fens and Lincoln Edge still to do.
- Include further walks from Districts.
- Relaunch improved Viking Way early 2024
- New area for KCIIIECP 2025, including links to paths that lead from it
- Developing product: re-wilding at Doddington Hall; Lincolnshire Coronation Coast National Nature Reserve (Saltfleetby/Theddlethorpe); Sandilands reserve (NT)
- Nature notes for children
- Waterways

Towns: Users are searching via towns, so we need to develop and enhance the presentation of Lincolnshire towns as good for our SEO. History of towns, Out and About Towns website. Stories.

Experiences: need to encourage businesses to develop packages. Product should be promoted on its emotional and experiential merits, in addition to functional attributes. tailored experiences and itineraries

Diversity, accessibility, inclusivity.

How to find us / Travel Page

Active Tourism, Ancestral Tourism, Weddings, Business Tourism, Food, Film Tourism, Itineraries and Bucket Lists, Overseas visitors.

Future considerations:

Interaction and tailored experiences and content – wizards, apps, push notifications, incentives.

Commercialisation – Leveraging performance and power of the brand.

Perception of 'Visitor' - Business Tourism, Weddings, Film tourism etc

Optimising content: Reasons to come, Must Do's for Segmented Groups: whether we do as bucket lists or itineraries, but the tone would fit the group. Develop template. Our two most important groups are Families and Older Couples. But we'd like to cover younger couples and teenagers as well. Could do a Why Visit Lincolnshire? Or a top 10 of must visits.

In keeping with our brand, product should always be beautifully presented and photographed. This is expensive, but bearing in mind Lincolnshire's non-perception image problem vital. Start by re-ordering photographic collection: Birds, Cycling; Water Rail Way, England Coastal Path, Viking Way Folders have already been done. Prepare Folders for Aviation Heritage, Walkers by Age, Children; Active Sport e.g surfing, water skiing, horse riding; Heritage; Shopping; Eating/Food. This exercise will highlight where we have a shortage of resources over and above the developing projects that will need new photography on completion.

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