



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

Report to:	Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee
Date:	12 July 2022
Subject:	Update on Visit Lincolnshire & Tourism Commission

Summary:

This report gives an update on the activities undertaken in year 1 (2021/22) to deliver the Tourism Commission Action Plan. It shows substantial progress has been made to promote Greater Lincolnshire to visitors and in supporting the strategic leadership of tourism businesses. Activity to date has focused on providing digital skills, business development, place making and opportunities to reduce seasonality.

Actions Required:

Members of the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee are invited to:

- (1) Note the current progress and provide input to assist Officers to plan and facilitate future Visitor Economy interventions.
- (2) Consider the year 2 action plan and determine whether it provides a local cohesive, evidence-led response to meet Greater Lincolnshire's Visitor Economy challenges and aspirations.

1. Background

There has been an enormous amount of disruption, change within the tourism sector during the Covid period, as a result the council has taken a strategic leadership role to support and shape the future industry offer within Greater Lincolnshire by setting up a Tourism Commission with local industry leaders in September 2020, chaired by Cllr Davie.

The commission met five times and produced a series of recommendations under the headings of Investment, Skills, Product Development and Marketing and additional resources were allocated by Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) to deliver them.

A two-year programme of activity was drawn up and year 1 has been delivered. This report describes the achievements of the first year and the plan for 2022/23; whilst recognising that some work is cross cutting.

2. Investment

A [Green Tourism Toolkit](#) has been produced in order to show how it could benefit visitor economy business by: addressing changing consumer trends; attract and retain the best staff; reduce operational costs; reduce negative environmental impact and help ensure their local area thrives. We accept that going greener is daunting, so the toolkit, through a series of small steps is there to support businesses.

Through the Coastal Community Fund, we are running a coastal pilot on a Green Tourism Ambassador programme. Representatives from coastal tourism businesses are being trained on how to better implement sustainability over a seven-month course. This has been oversubscribed and we plan to roll this out across Lincolnshire in year 2.

3. Business Strategy and Skills

Many businesses in the Visitor Economy have struggled with their digital skills, but the past two years has revealed that their general business skills need refreshing too. This has resulted in the development of a dedicated website [Business.Visitlincolnshire.com](https://www.business.visitlincolnshire.com), which was launched in November 2021. Its strapline is 'Hospitable You: Helping you run your business and stop it running you'. It was to be jargon free and aimed at the visitor economy. We asked businesses how they liked to learn, and it was clear that one size does not fit all, with some liking a video whilst others a factsheet, so we did both. It covers business planning, finance, funding, planning, marketing and digital as well as legislative and industry updates. The site features around 70 masterclass videos using a variety of experts, and each was filmed at a tourism business, and includes sections on market research, career and HR awards and support networks. The site is still developing, with the Green Tourism Toolkit being added in March 2022.

Working with the Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub we developed a programme called Hospitable Boost, based on our learning through developing the website. 29 businesses attended 12 masterclasses over a number of weeks. Initial group sessions were inspired by Lincolnshire video case studies, followed by 1 to 1 support, 1 to few and 1 to many masterclasses. Feedback has been excellent, and we already have a waiting list for a second Hospitable Boost series (beginning October 2022), so we are assuming there has been some word-of-mouth promotion; *"It has been fantastic. The masterclasses have been brilliant, and all the information was very relevant to me and my business. Enjoyed the discussions and engagement with other business owners"*.

To go alongside this, we work closely with Hayley Toyne, the Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub Advisor for the Visitor Economy. She has a host of knowledge and skills that are incredibly useful to the businesses she speaks to within the sector, and this is enhanced by the further development of tools being created on Business.Visit Lincolnshire website.

The website also has a section on Visitor Economy Careers and HR information which can be used to educate and inspire future employees. This seeks to showcase the wide variety of roles and opportunities and we are now working with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Careers Hub to extend this work further.

4. Product Development

The opportunity was taken to completely redevelop [visitlincolnshire.com](https://www.visitlincolnshire.com) which had formerly been a gateway site for Greater Lincolnshire that led onto individual authority sites, whether Unitary Authorities or District Councils. Information was key during lockdown and the new website was created to both Inspire and to Inform.

All local authorities have had the opportunity to shape the content on their area. It is the main consumer website for Greater Lincolnshire and is still operating as that first point of contact gateway. Much work is being done on search engine optimisation and vls.com is coming top on many searches, people tend to remain on the site because it has variety and quality that ultimately leads to bookings. The website being the main consumer facing site of Greater Lincolnshire.

The Cycling offer has been developed with Visit Lincoln (Destination Lincolnshire) and we have been working with the Countryside team on developing the Walking area, by far the most popular part of the website. Visitor Pledges have been used in many countries around the world. A Visitor Pledge video is in preparation which will major on respecting and protecting the countryside.

The site has enormous capacity for growth and is still developing with the bird watching area being the latest addition with officers working with Lincolnshire Bird Club, RSPB, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the National Trust. A coastal bird trail has been developed and is now on vls.com. This starts at Alkborough Flats in the north and finishes at Frampton Marsh in the south. The USP of the trail is that this is an insider's guide, a where to go, when to go and what to see by the people who really know. This is an affluent repeat-visiting market with a great fit with our walking and cycling offer. The [Coastal Bird Trail](#) has just gone live and features three videos, one on RSPB Frampton Marsh and two shorter ones on top tips.

There will be three further trails: Wolds/Marsh; Fens; Limestone/Trent Vale. The county council commissioned new photography at Alkborough Flats and Far Ings which it has shared with the group; interestingly the shoot at Alkborough Flats picked up a pair of glossy ibis, very rare visitors, proving that Greater Lincolnshire has much to offer. Promotion of the coastal bird trail will start at the Rutland Bird Fair in July.

Video has proved a successful area for both our consumer work and business support. Video case studies have been very well received and hearing from a fellow business on how they have done something is far more engaging than being informed by a consultant. We are producing more video case studies in year 2. We produced four short videos to go out during National Tourism Week (March 2022) as part of our promotional work, these were themed on Lincolnshire Food, Lincolnshire Outdoors, Cathedral 950th and new build,

and a vox pop on Why I love Lincolnshire. They were used on social media and now sit on vls.com so we are getting continued usage from them.

As part of our Heritage Product Development, we are producing a series of ‘Behind the Scenes’ heritage videos. Whilst they are promotional, they will be quite story based and so more engaging. The behind-the-scenes theme gives us plenty of leeway for a wide range of stories that work for each venue. These will be launched as completed during 2022/3.

5. Promotion and Marketing

Our social media activity has increased, both direct to the consumer and to visitor economy businesses. This is working well and will continue in Year 2. We have promoted the new website and our new product development. Behind the scenes much work is being done on search engine optimisation and ensuring that vls.com comes top in searches. In Year 1 we were still partially in lockdown and many people were holidaying in the UK, so rather than promoting businesses that were already fully booked we have concentrated our efforts in ensuring that our website and related product is the best it can be. We will continue this approach in Year 2.

Public Relations & Social Media

As an addition to the marketing for the websites, we have a visibility on several social media platforms. These continue to grow in popularity, with the reach and followers growing week on week.

Visit Lincolnshire	Business.Visit Lincolnshire
Facebook Page: facebook.com/visitlincolnshire @VisitLincolnshire Page Likes: 4,818 Reach & Impressions: 1,958,466	Facebook Page: facebook.com/visitlincolnshirebusiness @Visit Lincolnshire Business Page Likes: 41 Reach & Impressions: 419,284
Instagram: instagram.com/visitlincolnshire @visitlincolnshire Followers: 4,595 Reach & Impressions: 677,459	Twitter: twitter.com/visitlincs_biz @VisitLincs_Biz Followers: 150 Reach & Impressions: 19,533
Instagram: instagram.com/visitlincolnshire @visitlincolnshire Followers: 4,595 Reach & Impressions: 677,459	LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/visitlincolnshirebusiness @Visit Lincolnshire Business Followers: 264 Reach & Impressions: 5069
Pinterest: pinterest.com/visitlincolnshire Followers: 105 Reach & Impressions: 7,196	Facebook Group: facebook.com/groups/visitlincolnshirebusiness Members: 91 Active Members: 70

Visit Lincolnshire	Business.Visit Lincolnshire
	Newsletter List: business.visitlincolnshire.com/email-newsletter-subscription Subscribers: 67 Email Open Rate: 64%
Brand Hashtag: #VisitLincolnshire	Brand Hashtags: #VisitLincolnshire #GreenTourismLincolnshire
Commonly Used Hashtags: #Lincolnshire #LincolnshireCoast #LincolnshireWolds #LincolnshireHeritage #TravelInspiration #TravelTheWorld #TravelPics #VisitEngland #England #BeautifulBritain #UKShots	Commonly Used Hashtags: #LincolnshireBusiness #Lincolnshire #BusinessSupport #GreenTourism #Sustainability #SustainableTourism #SustainableBusiness #Destinations #DestinationMarketing #SmallBusiness #LincsConnect
Total Audience: 26,551 Total Reach & Impressions: 2,715,652	Total Audience: 613 Reach & Impressions: 443,886

The County Council have an annual contract with Mark Hibbert, a PR consultant who specialises in the tourism field. This contract covers Greater Lincolnshire and is to attract regional, national and international coverage (local coverage is dealt with in-house) and all local authorities can contact him direct to brief him on stories. The contract provides us with regular contact with travel media; regular use of social network media to promote the destination; included in monthly E-newsletter for travel editors and media; included in his weekly #newsin30second round-up for travel editors, writers, and bloggers; travel news round-up circulated to travel media.

In addition to this and to ensure that the PR machine runs smoothly, there is a further contract with Visit Lincoln/Destination Lincolnshire. When journalists come on familiarisation visits to Greater Lincolnshire there is considerable organisation required in making their trip successful: arranging transport, accommodation, meals, welcome packs etc. In liaison with Mark Hibbert, Visit Lincoln undertake this role on our behalf.

6. State of the Visitor Economy

We subscribe to the annual STEAM data which gives us a good picture of the state of growth in the visitor economy. Up to 2019 we were seeing very positive growth and tourism was worth £2.49bn to the economy of Greater Lincolnshire. It is no surprise that in 2020 this figure fell to £1.2bn and it does highlight how important the visitor economy is to Greater Lincolnshire. 2021 has seen a return to growth, even though the earlier part of the year was still in lockdown, tourism was worth £2.03bn. Hence, we are seeing a partial but not full recovery as yet. Many businesses are reporting the difficulty of recruiting staff, and this is a UK wide problem in the hospitality sector; this does add to the stresses and the difficulty sometimes of getting businesses to engage in skills development.

The number of day visitors recovered more strongly than staying visitors in terms of outright numbers. However, in terms of economic impact, staying visitors account for 61% of the total economic impact, with day visitors accounting for 39%.

Serviced accommodation, such as hotels and B&Bs appear to be struggling to recover in comparison to non-serviced accommodation such as caravans, cottages and airbnbs etc. Visitors using serviced accommodation are down 35% on 2019 levels, whereas non-serviced accommodation has only seen an 8% decrease. This is likely to reflect a combination of rules.

7. Update on 2021/22 work and future work streams

Year One 2021/22	Year Two 2022/23
Green Tourism Toolkit	Green Tourism Ambassador programme
Redeveloped www.visitlincolnshire.com (vls.com)	Develop new areas on vls.com
www.business.visitlincolnshire.com (bvls.com)	Develop new areas on bvls.com
Product Development: Bird Watching, Walking	Continue Product Development: Walking, Bird Watching, Heritage, Business Tourism, Visitor Pledge
Video: Case Studies, Tourism Week promotional videos, Birdwatching	Hospitable Boost programme
Visit Lincolnshire Conference March 22	Careers Promotion in conjunction with the LEP's Careers Hub and Enterprise Coordinators
Champing Research	Promotion of vls.com to local, national and international visitors
Business Tourism Research	Promotion of bvls.com to the Greater Lincolnshire visitor economy businesses to help them to develop, grow and become more resilient.
Social Media to consumers and to businesses	
Promotion of vls.com	

7. Conclusion

The tourism sector was badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic which led to tourism businesses needing to adapt their strategies and which also led to the opportunity to promote the area to people looking to take UK holidays. The actions resulting from the Tourism Commission have been able to give the sector the tools to develop and enhance their offer, whilst the re developed website and social media had helped to attract new business. Year 2 actions will continue to build on the foundations to help to ensure the Visitor Economy continues to recover, upskill and grow.

The resources used to fund the Tourism Commission was new funding from the Covid Recovery Fund and this was evenly split in terms of spend profile 2021/2 and 2022/3. During lockdown this has enabled LCC to take a more strategic tourism role and we have led on some major ticket items such as www.visitlincolnshire.com, www.business.visitlincolnshire.com and the green tourism toolkit and this seems to have been appreciated.

The tourism budget for `23/24 would be very small in comparison and it would be difficult to continue this role. We welcome the opportunity to discuss accessing future funding to achieve this agenda.

8. Consultation

A Tourism Commission, comprising tourism business representatives from across the greater Lincolnshire area helped to shape these priorities.

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

The main risks to investment in the Tourism sector relate to external factors in the Visitor Economy.

However, controllable factors include the risk of duplication between different types of organisations with an interest in the sector. The Greater Lincolnshire Tourism Officers' Group has been established to enable officers to collaborate and align their activity rather than risk proliferation and provides an incredibly useful forum for information sharing with the opportunity for external bodies to take 'guest spots' to help increase knowledge such as new and emerging trends.

9. Background Papers

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

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