

Arun District Council

REPORT TO:	Special Economy Committee - 20 November 2023
SUBJECT:	Destination Awareness Campaign, Arun District, Year 2
LEAD OFFICER:	Margaret Murphy, Tourism Development Officer
LEAD MEMBER:	Councillor Roger Nash, Chair of Economy Committee
WARDS:	ALL
CORPORATE PRIORITY / POLICY CONTEXT / CORPORATE VISION:	
Fulfilling Arun's economic potential	
Encourage the development of the district as a key tourist destination, supporting and enabling improvements and activities to increase visitor spend.	
DIRECTORATE POLICY CONTEXT:	
The Council's Economic Development Strategy includes the following 'Building Blocks' and priorities:	
Shaping our places for people to live, work and visit	
Attracting investment and success giving businesses the space and support to grow and prosper	
Putting people centre stage: healthy, happy, prosperous lives	
A growing business population	
FINANCIAL SUMMARY:	
There is provision in the 2023/24 budget to continue the campaign for a second year until March 2024. Some of this budget has been used for an 'interim arrangement' with the marketing agency, to cover the period of mid -June 2023 when the original agreement finished, until early November 2023, in order to maintain continuity of activity until this report can be reviewed by the Economy Committee. (See the Executive Summary)	
Should this report's recommendation be endorsed by the committee, a further agreement will be sought with the agency, subject to budget confirmation for the financial year of 2024/2025.	

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

In March 2022 the Economy Committee agreed to the commission of a Marketing Agency to deliver a 12 month "Digital Destination Awareness Campaign" for the Arun District and its tourism brand of "Sussex by the Sea". Following the delivery of this campaign this committee is asked to agree to a second year of campaign activity to build on that success.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that members agree:

- 2.1) That officers commission a second-year Digital Destination Awareness Campaign with the existing agency. This will ensure continuity of delivery and benefit from the knowledge, experience and working relationship built in year one. Officers will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the second-year campaign, to inform direction of future digital activity.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A recommendation was agreed at the Economy Committee of 29 March 2022 to appoint a marketing agency to deliver a 12-month Digital Destination Awareness Campaign for the district via the 'Sussex by the Sea' brand for the district.

Following a competitive procurement process 'Buzzword Creative' were appointed in early June 2022 and work started shortly afterwards. The campaign's aim has been to raise awareness of the Arun District and encourage visitors and residents to explore the district all year round.

The 12 month agreement finished in June 2023. Since then, as an interim measure and to maintain continuity until this committee meeting, the agency has continued to provide a service on a month-by-month payment arrangement. This report reviews the impact of the campaign and recommends that a second year campaign is continued into 2024.

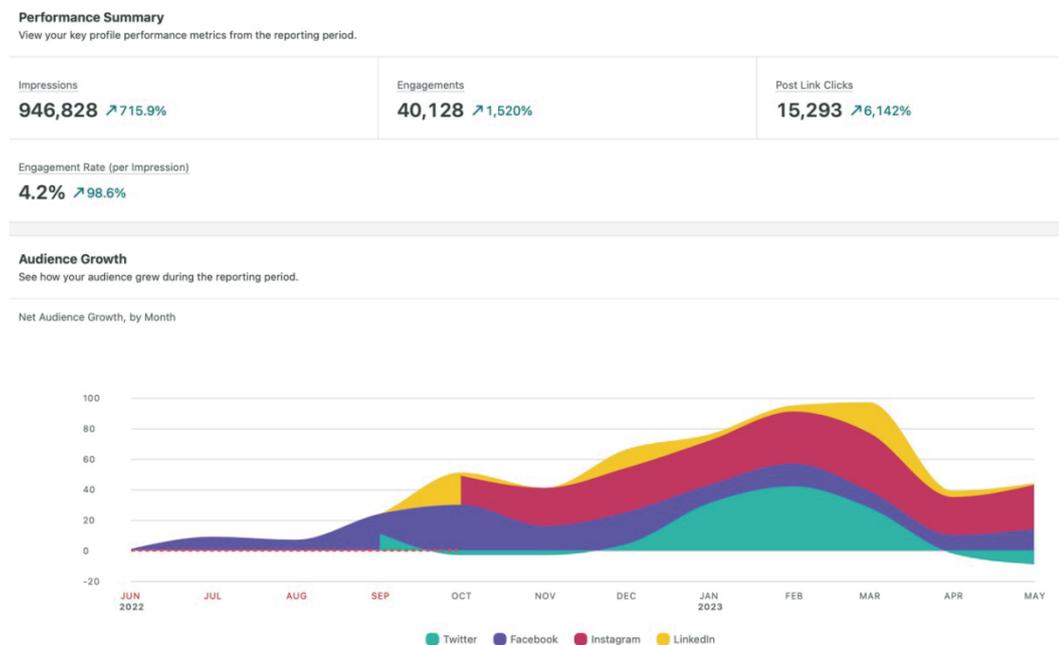
4. DETAIL

- 4.1. The aim of this campaign has been to digitally 'Raise Awareness' of the Arun district, its towns, villages and attractions, and to boost engagement on 'Sussex by the Sea' digital channels, encouraging more people to visit the whole Arun District, to support the local visitor economy, and to stay longer.
- 4.2 The campaign started in early June 2023 and following a period of discussions and the creation of a plan of action, there has been a clear increase in website page views and in engagements on www.sussexbythesea.com and its associated social media channels, as demonstrated in the following graphs and statistics. These details are also included in the agency's Progress Review Report, which is available to view at the link provided at the end of this committee report.
- 4.3 The graphs provided by the agency show data from 13 June 2022 – 18 May 2023. In the following copies of those graphs, the report shows that engagement and total audience growth has increased significantly, during the campaign.

4.4 Social Media Growth

The following graphs and statistics demonstrate how social media activity began to grow when the campaign started in mid-June 2022 and helped drive traffic to the website. The subsequent rise in statistics from August 2022 follows a delay in granting access to the marketing agency to manage the council's Sussex by the Sea social media channels, while addressing IT security concerns. Agency access to the social media accounts is necessary for the management of scheduled posts, videos, reels / stories, and 'paid for' Facebook adverts etc. as an integral part of the campaign.

Figure 1 Social Media growth June 2022 – May 2023



Figures 1 and 5 - Social Media Growth June 2022 – May 2023

The statistics on the Figure 1 graph for the period of June 22 – May 2023 show that during the campaign, there were 40,128 social media engagements (up 1,520% on the previous year) and 15,293 post link clicks (up 6,142%) and 946,828 'Impressions', up 715.9% on the previous year. This is also shown in more detail on the following Social Media Channel performance graph 5, which looks at the number of 'engagements' on each of the social media platforms.

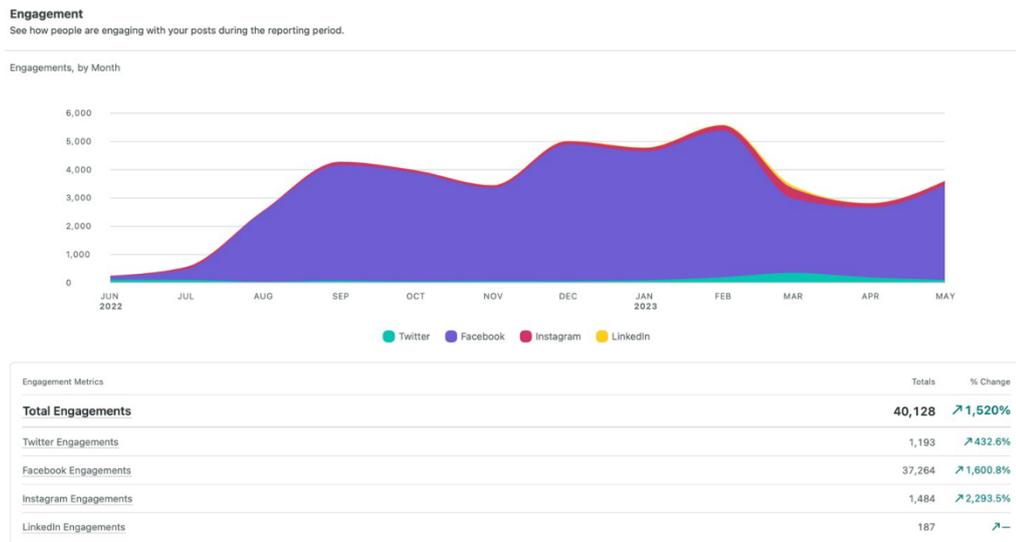
4.5 The agency confirmed that the most popular social media platform for 'Sussex by the Sea' is Facebook with 37,264 engagements from followers in this period, compared to just 1484 engagements on Instagram, and 1193 on Twitter during the same period: 13 June 2022 – 18 May 2023.

The 'Linked In' social media platform was also identified as a new opportunity to build business engagements. The figure of just 187 for this period is

indicative of the later creation of this new social platform account for ‘Sussex by the Sea’.

Facebook remains the highest performing channel, largely due to it being the preferred social platform amongst our user demographic, so the agency has invested funds from the campaign budget in regular ‘paid for’ Facebook adverts to boost specific posts to targeted audiences each including a link to the website, as the most efficient way of reaching more people.

Figure 5 Social Media Channel performance



4.6 Figure 2 Digital Platforms, comparison with the previous year

Looking at the year of June 2021 – June 2022 next to June 2022 – 18th May 2023 as a comparison, the graph on figure 2 shows a significant increase in social media page visits and general engagement as a result of increased activity on digital platforms since the start of the campaign in June 2022.

Figure 2 Comparison with previous year

Performance Summary

View your key profile performance metrics from the reporting period.

Impressions

1,081,260 ↗498%

Engagements

43,037 ↗743.7%

Post Link Clicks

15,562 ↗4,410.7%

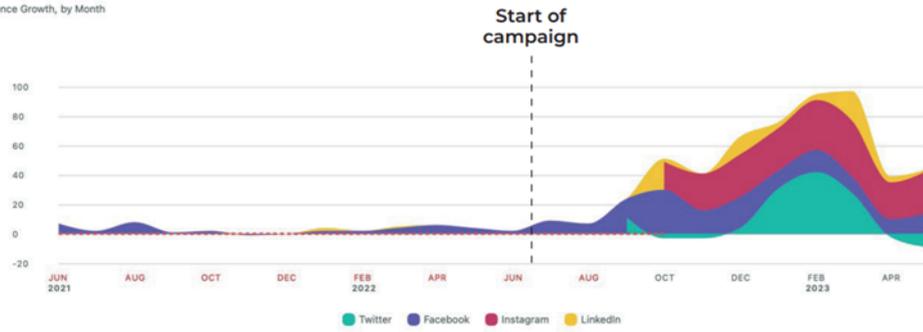
Engagement Rate (per impression)

4% ↗41.1%

Audience Growth

See how your audience grew during the reporting period.

Net Audience Growth, by Month



The number of 'engagements' are reported as 43,037; The number of 'Post Link Clicks' were 15,562 and Impressions at: 1,081,260. The slide also clearly marks where the campaign started and the subsequent growth in activity.

4.7 Figure 6 Social Media Channel Followers

For the period of 13th June 2022 –18th May 2023, the report shows that the number of 'followers' on all the social media accounts have risen, due to increased activity during the campaign. This demonstrates a growth of awareness of the district as a destination, even if some people do not actively 'engage' with all the content generated.

Figure 6 Social Media Channel followers

Profiles
Review your aggregate profile and page metrics from the reporting period.

Profile	Audience	Net Audience Growth	Published Posts	Impressions	Engagements	Engagement Rate (per Impression)	Video Views
Reporting Period Jun 13, 2022 – May 18, 2023	12,691 ↗ 526.1%	1,704 ↗ 920.4%	2,008 ↗ 485.4%	953,059 ↗ 649.9%	40,445 ↗ 1,357%	4.2% ↗ 94.3%	2,790 ↗ 266.1%
Compare to Jun 13, 2021 – May 18, 2022	2,027	167	343	127,099	2,776	2.2%	762
@sussexbythesea1	7,584	99	154	44,052	1,204	2.7%	23
Sussex by the Sea	3,200	1,328	1,670	868,711	37,541	4.3%	2,083
Sussex by the Sea	52	47	74	3,573	188	5.3%	—
sussexbytheseaarun	1,855	230	110	36,723	1,512	4.1%	684

Figure 6 in the campaign's Progress Review Report shows:

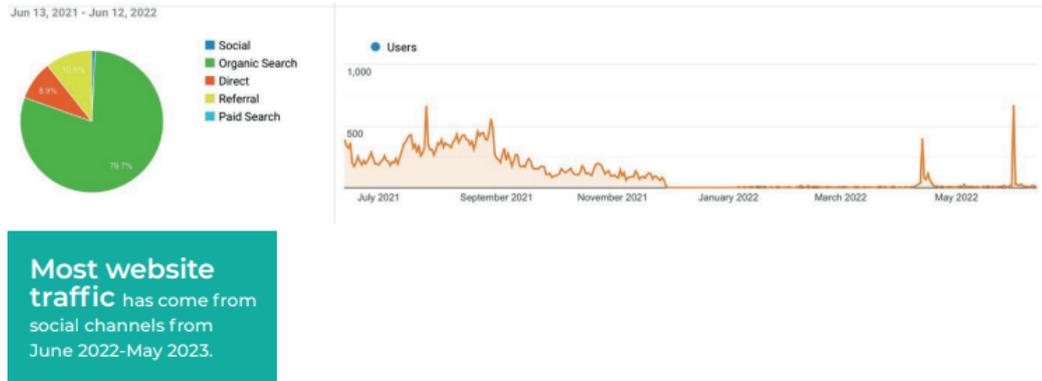
- a total social media audience of 12,691 compared to 2,027 in the previous year.
- there were 2,008 published posts across the channels compared to 343 the previous year and video views increased from 762 to 2,790.
- social media post 'engagements' were up from 2776 to 40,445 in the same period.

Another result of all this activity is that 'Impressions' - whereby promotional posts are 'fed' to other social media accounts via the media technologies, also increased from 127,099 to 953,059 during this period.

4.8 Figure 3 website statistics

Following the Tourism Review in July 2020 the decision was made to replace the former content and resource heavy website with a new and simpler portal site which now signposts visitors to our partners for information.

The website data graph below reflects the initial result of changing the website by recording a significant drop of website page views from December 2021 when the new site was launched, coinciding with a traditionally quieter time of year.



Data from July 2022 – May 2023 clearly shows the start of growth in website page views, as the new marketing campaign got underway, with improved SEO work and using social media posts to drive traffic to the website, the growth spikes from August onwards are a result of ‘paid for’ social media posts linking to themed blogs on the website and other regular activity.

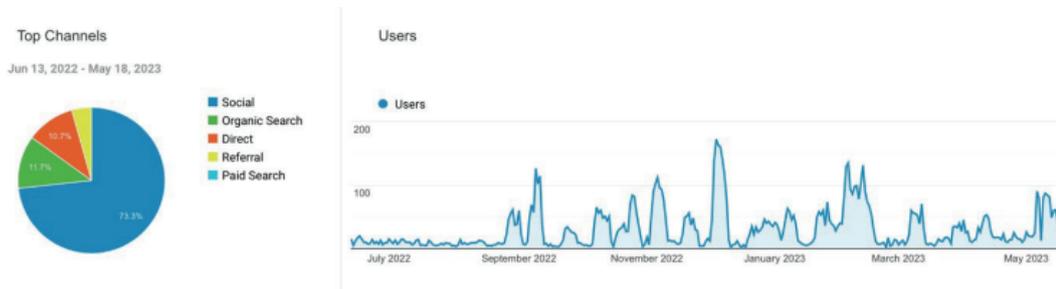
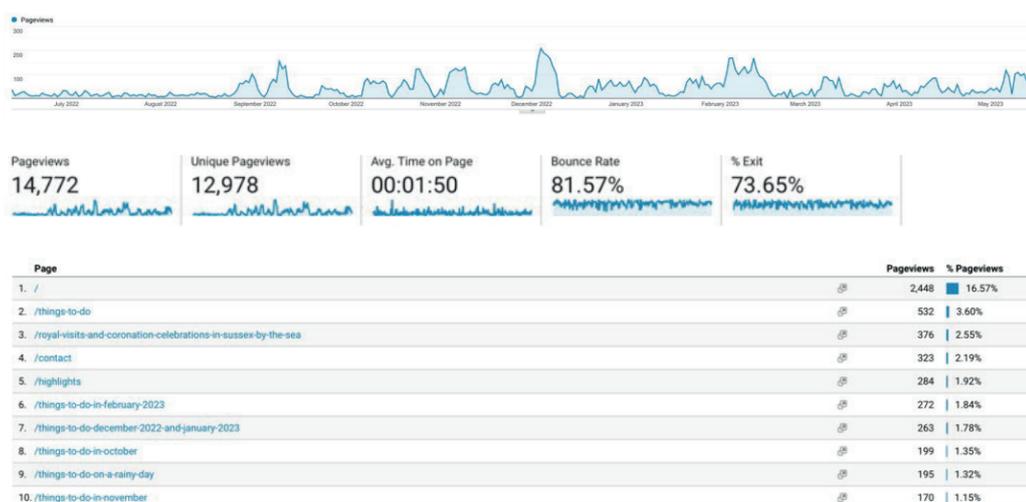


Figure 3 on page 6 of the report also advises that, when looking at website visitor traffic sources from June 2022 – May 2023, over 70% of visitors came from social media links, compared to 79% of organic search traffic the year before, - indicating that more people now engage with content on social channels, clicking on any provided links to websites if they wish to find out more.

4.9 Figure 4 website statistics

Of the website pages viewed, figure 4 in the report shows 14,772 page views (12,978 Unique Page Views) from mid-June 2022 – to mid-May 2023 and includes a list of the highest performing pages and blogs. The highest of these was the home page at 2448 views and ‘Things To Do’ at 532 views followed by individual blogs popular at different times such as ‘Royal Visits and Coronations’ and other titles in descending order.

Figure 4 website statistics



4.10 Page 11 of the Progress Review, linked at the end of this report, lists many of the goals achieved by the agency during the campaign including:

- Review and update of the Sussex By The Sea (SBTS) website to include initial audit and regular reviews thereafter.
- New blog content each month to generate more traffic to the website and encourage people to stay on the site longer before clicking on to partner websites.
- Strategic support and consultancy throughout the duration of the campaign period.
- Creation of visual branded assets for the website and social posts.
- Initial review and regular audit of SBTS social channels for maximum impact.
- Plan, schedule and delivery of fortnightly paid ads on Facebook.
- Creation of LinkedIn profile and regular updates.
- Revisiting the existing previously underused SBTS Instagram account and posting regularly.
- Social posting on all SBTS social channels on a minimum weekly basis
- Reviewing print ad and PR activities as required.
- Attending local networking events to gain a wider understanding of SBTS and further promote the brand.
- Review of visual assets and implementation of social media videos and

reels.

- Liaising with Blue Sail Consulting to clearly define future goals and vision for SBTS as part of the 2023 Visitor Strategy consultation.
- Scheduling and approving structured content across all channels to appeal to varied audience demographics.
- Regularly reporting on engagement analytics and findings.
- Implementing 'LinkTree' to social channels to direct traffic to key areas.
- Regularly reviewing profiles to keep them current and visually engaging.

4.11 In the period from mid- June to the date of this committee meeting there have been further activities and goals achieved by the Agency in an interim arrangement:

- Following the end of the 12 month digital campaign, the Agency accepted an interim working arrangement to continue the initial marketing agreement to coincide with the Council's scheduled Committee meetings.
- Google analytics reporting data has been updated and migrated to the new GA4(Google Analytics 4) reporting platform.
- Added the creation and delivery of video reels on SBTS social channels to boost engagement as part of marketing support.
- Added Instagram newsfeed posts to the website homepage.
- Developed and increased evergreen content for the SBTS website to improve SEO and increase website traffic.
- Streamlined social scheduling to save budget and reallocate budget to weekly social media ads on SBTS social channels for maximum impact.
- Provided guidance and options on how to work with social media 'influencers' who specialise in different segments of our key demographic and audience.
- Continue to meet online every fortnight to report on engagement stats, refine activities for best results and continue a proactive marketing support approach, as well as including reactive feedback, events and news from internal communications as instructed by the Council's Tourism Development Officer.
- Weekly internal reporting, monitoring of social channels and online engagement.

- Continued strategic guidance and support.

4.12 A list of key priorities and recommendations for 2023/24 are also supplied in the Agency's Progress Review:

- With the increased appetite for video content on social channels, create more visual content and reels for social media platforms.
- As well as 'Reels', more 'Stories' and interactive posts to encourage sharing 'User Generated Content', for instance, interactive content and polls / questions.
- Explore and maximise opportunities with regional and national tourism partnerships.
- Create a fortnightly focus on a different village/ward/areas within the Arun District.
- History stories/interesting facts/background of the area to educate and recruit new visitors to the area.
- Continue to add evergreen content on the website to encourage people to stay longer on the site.
- Refresh the website with updated text and images etc.
- Create infographics and new visuals to promote tourism in the Arun District.
- Support with internal communications as needed, to define and confirm key goals for 2023/24 and offer guidance and support with all marketing as needed.
- Continue to use engagement insights to tailor an effective digital marketing strategy for maximum impact and profile awareness.

4.13 During this campaign, officers have benefitted by a growing understanding of marketing as a complex and many faceted element of the tourism industry.

Delivery of various activities by the agency has evolved through a mix of shared experience, knowledge, and creative thinking. Recommendations have been discussed, adopted, and in some cases adapted, including the creation of regular themed 'blogs' on subjects such as 'Things To Do' each month.

Further blogs and associated social media posts on themes such as 'Budget' and 'Free' activity ideas, Dog Friendly and Seasonal, Mindfulness, Wellbeing, Nature and Sustainable activities etc have also been planned and created by the agency with the Tourism Officer's input and local business knowledge. Other ideas on different themes have been discussed and a good partnership has developed to facilitate the range of activities.

- 4.14 The paid for posts have also been created and scheduled by the agency to target specific demographics including, for example Arun District residents and those within 15 miles of the district border, to encourage local, more carbon aware visits, to discover the towns, coast, and countryside of the Arun District 'on their doorstep' and resulting in opportunities to 'educate' a new audience on the delights of the district.
- 4.15 The social media activity created and managed by the agency is boosted by sharing posts published by our local visitor economy and hospitality businesses and town website partners. This is currently managed mainly by the Tourism Development Officer, as it is a useful and efficient way of gathering information on events and activities - direct from the hospitality businesses and our website partners.
- 4.16 If the recommendation for a Year 2 campaign is supported, the plan is to build on the first-year experience and focus more on:
- More scheduled alignment with regional and national partnership campaigns to help 'amplify' the district's messages and stories.
 - Create more PR and themed activity, aligning with our tourism sector partners regarding subjects such as the new 'England's Coast Path', encouraging travel by alternative means to car use wherever possible, plus other carbon awareness activities, and begin to share the new 'narratives' being developed both for the district and Sussex wide as two of the 'priority actions' in the proposed new 2023 – 2028 Visitor Strategy.
 - Develop more relationships with selected social media 'influencers' across our audience segmented demographic.
 - Encourage the agency to take more ownership of the shared social media posts published by local hospitality businesses, benefitting from the shared experience gained in Year 1 as the project has evolved.

5. CONSULTATION

N/A

6. OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

6.1 A : The council do not renew the current agreement but procure a new campaign with an amended brief and start a new competitive tender process. This will take considerable time to complete and delay delivery of the Y2 campaign. As we have only recently tendered for this work it is unlikely to produce better value for money.

B: The council do not work with external agencies but revert to managing the marketing of the district within the Council's resources alongside the many other activities and projects delivered. The council, however, does not have the level of technical expertise or understanding of digital marketing to implement this, nor the staffing capacity.

7. COMMENTS BY THE GROUP HEAD OF FINANCE/SECTION 151 OFFICER

7.1 There is provision in the 23/24 budget to continue the campaign for a second year until March 2024. If the recommendation is supported, a further agreement will be sought with the agency, subject to budget confirmation for the financial year of 2024/2025.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Considerations have included the continued business viability of the marketing agency and council resource to manage a continuing similar arrangement, as well as the risk that the marketing agency may not wish to renew, resulting in a new procurement process.

9. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP HEAD OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE & MONITORING OFFICER

9.1 There are no Legal or Governance implications.

10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

10.1 Officers believe that there would be no Human Resources impacts arising from the work described in this report.

11. HEALTH & SAFETY IMPACT

11.1 No additional health & safety impacts have been identified in relation to the proposals.

12. PROPERTY & ESTATES IMPACT

12.1 There would be no Property & Estates impacts arising from the work described in this report

13. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) / SOCIAL VALUE

13.1 Officers believe that the recommendations do not impact characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010

14. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT/SOCIAL VALUE

14.1 Officers believe that there are no climate change & environmental impact issues which need to be considered from the proposals in this report.

15. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

15.1 Officers believe that there are no direct impacts on Crime and Disorder Reduction arising from this report.

16. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT

16.1 Officers believe that there are no relevant human Rights implications arising from these proposals that will affect or potentially affect any individual.

17. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION / DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS

17.1 Officers believe that there are no Freedom of Information or Data Protection issues arising from the proposals in the report

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

[Economy Committee Report from 29 03.22](#)

[Buzzword Creative Progress report](#)

www.sussexbythesea.com - portal website, partners and associated social media