

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO AND DECISION OF BOGNOR REGIS REGENERATION SUB COMMITTEE ON 4 FEBRUARY 2020

SUBJECT: Summary of tourism support currently provided by Arun District Council

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DATE: 10th January 2020

EXTN: 37859

PORTFOLIO AREA: Economy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Arun District Council supports tourism in many ways, with several departments working hard to keep the district attractive, clean and safe.

Specific Tourism Support sits within the Economy Group and provides a range of initiatives managed by the Tourism Business Development Officer, covering many different areas of activity.

This report sets out the key activities that are either led by the Council or that we play a significant role in delivering.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Members are requested to note the contents of the report.

1. BACKGROUND:

With two famous seaside towns both benefitting from quality beaches and coastline, the world-famous historic town of Arundel plus the River Arun linking the coast to the South Downs National Park, the Tourism Sector plays an important role in the district's economy.

The Arun district attracts approximately 4.04 million visitors per year generating a total spend of approximately £298.1 million (Source: Tourism South East, Economic Impact of Tourism Report 2018) indicating that the Arun District continues to be an attractive, thriving place in which to visit, as well as to live and work in. See Item 2 and link to full report as a Background Paper.

Arun District Council continues to support tourism in many ways, with several departments working hard to keep the district attractive, clean and safe. Specific Tourism Support sits within the Economy Group and provides a range of initiatives. There is currently one full time equivalent post working in that team, the Tourism Business Development Officer, who works with a wide range of delivery partners, both within the Council and external partners.

2. TOURISM INITIATIVES AND PROJECTS

2.1 THE VALUE OF THE VISITOR ECONOMY TO THE DISTRICT

The Council currently commissions an annual report by the regional tourist board and industry experts Tourism South East. These reports are delivered each August / September for the previous full calendar year. The most recent edition we have is for 2018 which reports the following:

Key results for 2018:

- 4.04 million trips were undertaken
- 3.43 million day trips
- 0.61 million overnight visits
- 1.74 million nights in the area as a result of overnight trips
- £120.7 million spent by tourists during their visit to the area
- £10.06 million spent on average in the local economy every month
- £116.1 million generated by overnight visits
- £104.6 million generated from day trips
- £298.1 million spent in the local area as a result of tourism (taking into account multiplier effects)
- 5,972 jobs supported, both for residents and from those living nearby
- 4,560 tourism jobs directly supported
- 1,412 non-tourism related jobs supported (linked to multiplier spend from tourism)
- 13.0% of population employed as a result of tourism in Arun District

Attention is also drawn to page 3 of the report which provides further explanation of these figures plus pages 1 and 2 which provides the regional and national figures for comparison.

The 2018 full Economic Impact report is provided as a Background Paper and also available to view online at www.sussexbythesea.com/tourism-business-centre. The 2019 figures are expected in the late summer of 2020

Since the last 'Summary of Tourism Support' report (June 2017), the Council's

Economy Group team have been working closely alongside neighbouring District Councils, in partnership with Coastal West Sussex and Experience West Sussex

This has led to many benefits including economies of scale, resources and skills for tourism marketing and projects across West Sussex. As part of this ongoing partnership, the council is considering jointly commissioning an annual Economic Impact of Tourism report with other local councils. This would replace the individual Arun report prepared by Tourism South East and generate cost efficiencies

2.2 PROMOTING THE ARUN DISTRICT TO VISITORS AND RESIDENTS

'Sussex by the Sea' is the tourism 'brand' of Arun District Council, widely recognised in printed publications, social media, lamp post banners and on search engines - it is used to promote the whole district to visitors and residents as the official source of tourist information.

Originally adopted in 1994 the brand is promoted using a suite of marketing tools to reach as wide an audience as possible and includes:

- Website
- Social Media
- Visitor Guide
- Visitor Information Points
- Destination Marketing

The Tourism Business Development Officer also supports a range of other tourism related activities including:

- Servicing the Visitor Information Points
- Visitor Enquiry handling: received via website, email, phone and post
- Working with the Council's Event Officer– collaborating on event information.
- Participating via partners in projects such as the Coastal England 2021 'Year of the Coast'
- Continuing promotion of Quality Assurance and similar schemes for accommodation providers and attractions
- Sharing information and invitations to networking, skills and training workshop events delivered by industry partners
- Working with a new partner on a wider brochure fulfilment service and possible e-marketing campaigns

- Sourcing and promoting local tourism business developments and news
- Working closely and creatively with marketing partners: Council departments such as Design, Communications and Property & Estates; and Town Councils in Bognor Regis, Littlehampton and Arundel on projects including:
 - new artwork for Bognor Regis promenade notice boards
 - joint marketing initiatives such as; sponsorship of drone filming and photography of a national and international Kite Surfing Champion in Bognor Regis;
 - sponsoring a competition for the switch on of the Christmas Lights in Littlehampton; and advertising with the Arundel Festival.

Each of the methods and initiatives listed potentially reach different segments of our audience and markets at different times. We aim to keep up with industry trends and are open to new ideas as they present themselves.

2.3 WWW.SUSSEXBYTHESEA.COM

The Council commissioned an updated tourism specific website and database which went live in April 2013. This replaced the previous version which needed development and was expensive to maintain and upgrade.

www.sussexbythesea.com is currently hosted by Verseone Technologies along with the Content Management System (CMS) that builds and manages the Council's tourism database which feeds the website. Both the website and CMS are currently managed by the Tourism Business Development Officer.

Verseone Technologies also provide the Council's corporate website www.arun.gov.uk and it's CMS and database - managed by the Communications Team.

The current site www.sussexbythesea.com is the main online marketing tool and "Virtual Visitor Information Centre" holding a wide range of useful information for visitors and residents.

The site includes many links to the Arun District Council website e.g. Beach, Car Parks, Parks and Open Spaces and currently works satisfactorily on mobile devices.

We are very aware that the Sussex by the Sea website is now once again showing its age and requires updating for several reasons. To this end we are in the process of reviewing how the online tourism presence will look and be delivered in the future, options being considered are:

- Commissioning a new Sussex by the Sea website, designed to meet the latest technical, legal and customer expectations for a website and using an easier to use desktop publishing application and Content Management System.
- Creating a website portal that could sit within the Council's main website or stand alone, reducing the amount of searchable information included and relying more on linking to other local place-based websites that have been developed in recent

years and the social media technology, blogs and podcasts.

- Develop new ways of providing information, in shorter 'sound bites' to reflect current needs of visitors with less time or inclination to read long tracts of text e.g. new 'Quick Links Pages' and that are mobile friendly.

However, technology and trends are constantly changing. We are mindful of the need to continue to investigate and embrace new ways of providing information and inspiration to potential visitors and residents, in order to maintain a good share of the tourism market, but in a resource effective way.

As a Local Authority, Arun District Council's Visitor Information still seems to be a 'trusted' source of information, but with the development of so much 'FREE' new technology the varied ways to deliver that information are more 'fragmented' and can in some cases be more resource and time consuming to utilise.

WEBSITE CONTENT

Visitors to the website www.sussexbythesea.com are currently able to find a wealth of information, including:

- Information on each town and the district
- Specific subject pages e.g. Accessibility, Beaches, Parks, Things to Do, Cycling & Walking etc
- Searchable categories for individual business listings e.g. Where to Stay, Things to Do & What's On
- Descriptions and contact details for hundreds of local tourism businesses, attractions, accommodation, event organisers, food & drink, transport providers and retailers. (Each tourism business in the Arun District has a FREE website listing in their relevant search category which can be upgraded to an 'Enhanced Listing' or Banner advert for a fee)
- An Itinerary Planner tool and Blogs
- There is also a Tourism Business Centre Page which includes useful information for local businesses on a range of tourism industry subjects

With such a large amount of content managing this data is an ongoing and almost daily task to keep up to date.

As the core digital source of tourist information are used for many different aspects of Tourism Support and reference, it is estimated that on average at least 25 - 30% of any working week of the officer will be spent on the website and CMS database in one way or another.

GOOGLE ANALYTICS AND SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

Google Analytics reports that for the full year to date there were 144,298 page views on the site, compared to 195,410 in the same period last year.

The Top 10 pages viewed are: What's On, Bognor Regis, Littlehampton Attractions, Things to Do, Home, Where to Stay, Arundel Attractions, Arundel, Littlehampton

The most popular landing page continues to be "What's On", with 14,115 views in the current year to date, compared to 18,431 in the same period last year.

These figures are, once again, down in comparison to previous years, but there may be several reasons for this. For example; the continued rise in the use of Social Media and other online media as prime sources of shared information for many people. Facebook is being used increasingly by many organisations to publicise their events and for many people it is the first and often only place they search.

There is also growing competition from other local websites promoting the individual towns of the area, and their events. Some of these sites are new and growing; for example, Experience West Sussex and Love Bognor Regis, plus other commercial tourism sites.

2.4 SOCIAL MEDIA

The popularity and use of Social Media continues to grow and is still proving to be an effective free to use and powerful communications tool. The council uses the different platforms to promote our tourism offer in several ways.

'Sussex by the Sea' is very active on both Facebook and Twitter and these media have developed into a major and (crucially) a relatively quick way of transmitting 'live' tourist information to a wide and ever-growing audience.

Social Media continues to be a growing element to the tourism role - the information discovered via this media is also used to populate and update the tourism website where relevant, particularly with events.

The Facebook account currently has nearly 1,640 followers (compared to 1200 as noted on the previous report in June 2017) and the Twitter page nearly 7348 followers compared to 6500 in June 2017.

Posts and tweets by local attractions and other tourism businesses are reposted/shared/retweeted, 'liked' and shared and are an increasingly efficient way to contact businesses.

Sussex by the Sea also has a presence on Instagram. This platform is very popular with users and useful for 'User-generated content' (UGC). However, sharing the interesting posts and images with our followers is not as straight forward as the other platforms but this is being explored further. Instagram images can now be shared via Facebook and Twitter accounts and this is being implemented.

Tripadvisor. In some cases, this platform is a business's only online presence and it can be a useful research tool to find new businesses and check on the quality reviews

for information and promotion purposes.

'Google My Business', 'Pinterest' and the rising phenomena of podcasts are also media to potentially utilise and develop.

2.5 THE SUSSEX BY THE SEA VISITOR GUIDE

The Sussex by the Sea visitor guide provides "Inspiration & Information" for Arundel, Bognor Regis, Littlehampton and The South Downs and continues to be the principle printed tourism marketing tool for the whole district, designed in house by the Council's Design Team.

The decision was made in early 2019 to change the style of the guide, make each edition valid for two years instead of an annual production and to not include advertising.

100,000 copies of the new A5 size guide (compared to 65,000 copies of the previous smaller DL size) were printed in early 2019 and are distributed in several different ways

The guide is popular with visitors, residents and local tourism businesses and is available from: Leaflet Exchanges and networking events, local tourism businesses and local Visitor Information Points (approximately 7,000 copies so far this year), plus:

- Approximately 300 online requests for a paper version were received in 2019.
- Just under 50,000 copies were distributed in 2019 by three main distributors throughout the UK, via a mixture of attractions, hotels, motorway service stations, supermarkets, national Tourist Information Centres (TICs) and other outlets. For example:
 - 300 via Holiday Guide Finder via an online brochure request service
 - 22,107 via Take 1 Media, via: National TICs, Selected South East Motorway Service Stations, Accommodation & Attractions and online individual requests
 - 28,100 via Brochure Connect via : National TICs Accommodation & Attractions, Transport hubs, Shopping Centres, libraries and community centres throughout West Sussex & its border areas

It is recognised that some people don't have easy access to the internet and prefer a paper copy of a publication to browse and to have with them during a visit.

Experience shows that visitors may have done their research online, but on arrival want to ask questions and have printed information to carry around for inspiration, often discovering something that they would not have thought to search for online

The guide directs readers to discover more on the Sussex by the Sea and partner

websites and covers these themes:

- What's on Highlights
- All about our three towns & the South Downs
- Inspiration & ideas for: families; outdoor pursuits; entertainment, culture & history; getting active & relaxing;
- Where to Eat, Shop & Stay
- Maps & how to find out more information

Accommodation listings which used to be part of the printed visitor guide are now available as a downloadable pdf on the website.

As we move into the second year of this guide, the costs and efficacy of this approach will be reviewed in 2020 before starting on the next two-year edition for 2021/2022.

2.6 VISITOR INFORMATION POINTS (VIPs)

The Council continues to work closely with partners to deliver a Visitor Information facility in all three district towns, each providing 'call in and collect' tourism leaflet facilities. Working with partners means that we can continue to offer a local customer facility alongside the online and print media.

There is currently one VIP each in Arundel & Bognor Regis and, since the closure of the Look & Sea Centre in 2018, several smaller VIPs within existing businesses and organisations in Littlehampton

ARUNDEL VISITOR INFORMATION POINT (VIP)

The Arundel Museum Society continues to host a tourism leaflet display for the town's attractions and immediate Arun District, South Downs and Chichester area, inside the foyer of the town's museum

Located in a prime position in the town, next to the main car / coach park and opposite the Castle entrance, local knowledge of the town's attractions is provided by Museum Society volunteers, alongside local history museum displays, a range of museum events (including guided walks in the town) and educational facilities for school groups. The facility is open every day throughout the year except for Christmas and New Year.

Leaflet supplies are currently co-ordinated and supplied by the Council's Tourism Development Officer from specialist suppliers. Specialist tourism knowledge and liaison on operational matters are also regularly sought and supplied to staff and volunteers at the museum.

There is no annual cost to the Council, apart from officer time and occasional small projects paid for from the tourism development budget.

BOGNOR REGIS VISITOR INFORMATION POINT (VIP)

As part of the Council's Accommodation Review, the Visitor Information facility moved from the council owned building, previously occupied by the Observer Newspaper in

January 2018.

The Visitor Information facility is now located within the foyer of the Regis Centre and has developed into a good partnership with management and staff of Arun Arts Ltd, bringing tourist information to a lot more people who use the Regis Centre facilities and attend the wide range of shows and entertainment. Regis Centre staff and volunteers are helpful to visitors and residents, alongside their other duties.

Leaflet supplies are co-ordinated by the Council's Tourism Business Development Officer. Specialist tourism knowledge and liaison on operational matters are also regularly supplied.

In addition, tourism leaflets are also available in the Bognor Regis seafront Beach Office, and other locations may be added in future, subject to time resources.

Early in 2019 specialist software and a new digital display screen was purchased and located inside the centre. The content is managed remotely and displays up to date information on What's On, tourism messages etc.

There is no direct cost to the Council for supplying the Visitor Information Facility, apart from officer time and small projects paid for from the tourism development budget as and when required, for example the Digital Screen and its annual licence.

LITTLEHAMPTON LOCAL VISITOR INFORMATION POINTS

A staffed facility at the Look & Sea Heritage Exhibition operated under a Service Level Agreement with the trust for many years until 2018. Leaflet supplies were previously co-ordinated by the Look & Sea VIC staff with some assistance from the Council's Tourism Development Officer, along with specialist knowledge and liaison on operational matters.

With the closure of the Look & Sea VIC the decision was made to find other sites that could accommodate visitor information displays. A range of local businesses and retailers in Littlehampton now provide Information Points within their premises in the town centre, river side and seafront. This new service was fully operational this summer.

Each VIP is branded with signage and location maps to signpost to alternative information points if the businesses are closed. The new provision and locations will be reviewed and monitored for improvement.

2.7 TOURISM BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

The Tourism Business Development Officer continues to work with the district's wide range of tourism businesses, advising on issues and queries, encouraging and advising new contacts and helping existing businesses develop skills and quality, when time allows.

Business visits, to help with marketing, social media, Quality Assurance, training and skills opportunities and other information take place as time allows, as well as email

and telephone conversations, with some group help from local forums such as the West Sussex Attractions Group.

2.8 CUSTOMER SERVICE

Despite all the activity online, customer enquiries and visitor guide requests continue to arrive, can be around 10 - 20 per week at peak times, via the website, email, phone and occasional letter. A log is kept of the source and geography of these requests.

Enquiries can be as 'in depth' as working out an itinerary for first time visitors from the US and Australia, to wanting the name and contact details of a business, or vacancy details during Bank Holidays and Goodwood events etc. As much as possible and where appropriate, all enquiries are answered with links back to specific pages on the website and subject to GDPR and the Council's Privacy Policy.

2.9 WORKING WITH TOURISM PARTNERS

A good relationship has been cultivated and continues with the tourism officers at all three town councils and 'Visit Arundel', collaborating and sharing information and marketing ideas and also working with the Tourism Lead Officer at The South Downs National Park Authority.

We continue to work as much as possible with other Sussex Destination Managers at destinations across West and East Sussex .

The brand 'Love Sussex' and its website portal, linking all Sussex authorities has recently been closed due to fewer resources across the various local authorities. The remaining individual Tourism Officers at these authorities continue to keep in touch via email to share knowledge and experience.

Arun District Council continues to be a member of the regional Tourist Board, Tourism South East and works in partnership on projects with the national Tourist Board, Visit England/ VisitBritain, Coastal West Sussex and West Sussex County Council via the partnership "Experience West Sussex"

COASTAL WEST SUSSEX AND 'EXPERIENCE WEST SUSSEX' TOURISM PARTNERSHIP

The Council continue to work closely with Coastal West Sussex, neighbouring District Councils and West Sussex County Council in a partnership to encourage more visitors across the county.

Arun's Chief Executive Officer Nigel Lynn, is the project sponsor of the Experience West Sussex Partnership on behalf of the Chief Executives Working Group.

The Experience West Sussex Partnership was established in 2018. All the district and borough council authorities across West Sussex work together with West Sussex County Council and the Coastal West Sussex Partnership to support the visitor economy. The Strategic Investment Fund (Business Rate Pool) is funding a four-year programme of work.

Experience West Sussex is a destination partnership created to deliver collective value through leadership, inspiration and collaboration for the benefit of West Sussex' visitor economy.

The aim of the programme is to grow the value of the West Sussex visitor economy, increase visits and stays all year round, increase recognition that West Sussex is an active, vibrant and dynamic place for residents, businesses and visitors and ensure West Sussex has stand out appeal in the competitive world of tourism destinations.

The Experience West Sussex Partnership is demonstrating its worth as a vehicle to collectively maximise value through strategy development and delivery, increased marketing reach, and by leveraging benefit for the area from strategic relationships including Visit Britain / Visit England and Gatwick Airport.

Arun District Council provide officer time to attend development meetings, networking events, plus local knowledge of the district's tourism attractions, local images and copy, events information etc.

The public face of this project and campaign is www.experiencewestsussex.com. It includes 'experiences', blogs and itineraries to inspire visitors who are looking for activities and quality visits to the county, benefiting from working with a professional design and marketing agency.

More links have been created from www.sussexbythesea.com and other neighbouring West Sussex district websites to and from Experience West Sussex and social media is actively being utilised to share stories across the different partner organisations, as time permits.

2. PROPOSAL(S): None, this report is for information only

3. OPTIONS: None, this report is for information only

4. CONSULTATION: None, this report is for information only

Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council		x
Relevant District Ward Councillors		x
Other groups/persons (please specify)		x
5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)	YES	NO
Financial		x
Legal		x
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment		x
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		x

Sustainability		X
Asset Management/Property/Land		X
Technology		X
Other (please explain)		X
6. IMPLICATIONS: Not applicable		

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION: Not applicable

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

The Economic Impact of Tourism in the Arun District 2018 can be found at:
www.sussexbythesea.com/tourism-business-centre

The previous Tourism Support Report on the 26June 2017 Item 7 Page 180.
<https://democracy.arun.gov.uk/Data/Bognor%20Regis%20Regeneration%20Subcommittee/20170626/Agenda/Agenda.pdf>