

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO AND DECISION OF THE ECONOMY COMMITTEE ON 26 JULY 2021

PART A : REPORT

SUBJECT: STRATEGIC REVIEW OF ARUN DISTRICT COUNCILS TOURISM SERVICE

REPORT AUTHOR: Denise Vine, Group Head of Economy
DATE: June 2021
EXTN: 37846
AREA: Economy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This review considers all aspects of the council's current tourism support functions. The report summarises the recommendations and findings made in the strategic review of the tourism service by Blue Sail Consulting and makes recommendations for the future delivery of tourism services by the council.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee is requested to:

1. Support the four strategic recommendations (also listed in para 1.14) contained within the Arun Strategic Review of Tourism (October 2020) – Appendix A.
2. Approve the proposed changes to the service.
3. Instruct officers to implement these changes.

1. BACKGROUND:

1.1. Tourism is a key sector in Arun and very important to our local economy. The approved Arun Economic Strategy 2020-2025 identified, from the evidence base, the importance of the sector locally and that it should be treated as a priority sector. It is a major provider of jobs and income (visitor spend) and supports many businesses and a supply chain well beyond the most obvious attractions and venues.

1.2. But while the nature, funding and role of local government has changed dramatically and visitors' expectations have risen, the types of services provided by the council to support tourism have remained largely unchanged for the last decade.

1.3. Combined with the challenges of Covid-19, this therefore is an ideal time to press 're-set' – to agree what needs to be done and why; where should the priorities and focus be and to decide how best to deliver that.

1.4. The council needs to consider how best to take forward its tourism function and decide what is the best way to deliver this service, with the resources available to us, and in a format that meets modern visitors' expectations.

1.5. Blue Sail Consulting were commissioned in July 2020 to carry out a review of our tourism function. The review has considered all aspects of our current tourism support offer and has made recommendations for the future delivery of the tourism service.

1.6. The review took account of what is already being done by others in the district towns of Bognor Regis, Littlehampton and Arundel as well as work at a county level through Experience West Sussex.

1.7. It considered whether the council or others were best placed to deliver the services visitors need or if there are other ways of delivering these services. It also considered the immediate and longer-term impacts of Covid-19 and ensuring the recommendations align to other council objectives such as those in the Arun Economic Strategy.

1.8. All aspects of the current service were reviewed including the main tourism facilities and services supported by the council including the Visitor Information Points (VIPs), website, social media, visitor guides etc. It also reviewed all marketing plans and activities and considered how well the destination is performing and whether there are market opportunities and activities to exploit.

1.9. The consultants engaged with a range of key stakeholders, including key members, via telephone consultations which fed into the findings.

1.10. Areas explored included:

- Current performance, gaps and opportunities
- Alternative ideas for destination marketing and management
- Opportunities for collaboration and new models for delivery

1.11. The review was required to produce a strategic report with clear recommendations to include:

- Strategic context and rationale
- Review of current delivery
- Recommended roles in destination marketing and destination management to include an assessment of the destination strengths and opportunities
- Organisation and resourcing implications

1.12. The completed review document is contained in Appendix A.

1.13. The review has identified four strategic initiatives that will allow the council to shift from tourism delivery (marketing, information) to a strategic commissioning, investment and development role. By doing this the council can be clear about what it wants to achieve and work through others, who are better placed, to deliver it through visitor marketing. The council can then use its influence (inside and outside the council) to improve the visitor experience – to make it as good as it can be, and to secure the types of investment which will help the district build its visitor economy.

1.14. The four strategic recommendations for the tourism service are:

- Strategic Tourism Investment Role – this is natural territory for the council with a strategic and operational focus. Strategically we want to secure investment in the district (accommodation, events, attractions, water sports) and operationally we need to ‘show the way’ in lifting the quality of the visitor experience (public realm, signage, beach management, toilets) and advocate for visitors across the public and private sector.
- A Refreshed Tourism Strategy – prepare a new plan setting out clearly what we want to achieve as a destination and bring focus and clarity to the actions that are needed. We can’t do everything, given limited resources, so the plan will help to be very targeted in choosing where to focus. It is also an opportunity to engage stakeholders more closely in the development and delivery of the strategy.
- A shared narrative – develop thematic and town-based narratives for all to use. To attract new visitors, we need everyone involved in tourism saying the same messages in a similar way through all of their own marketing. But what is that narrative now and how do we address the differences between the towns? This isn’t about a logo or even a brand identity – it is a richer seam of stories and narratives, images and ideas that everyone can use which highlight the ‘very best’ of the district.
- Commission marketing support – invest in the Experience West Sussex project to deliver regional campaigns that attract new visitors and work hard to get our fair share of that business. And invest in the information and marketing services in each of Arundel, Littlehampton and Bognor Regis.

1.15. It is possible to support these recommendations within existing resources and the review suggests other funding and income streams that may also further support additional activities.

1.16. The review was presented and discussed at the Littlehampton Regeneration Subcommittee (LRSC) on 7 October 2020 and the Bognor Regis Regeneration Subcommittee (BRRS) on 21st October 2020. Adam Bates, Blue Sail Consulting, presented the findings of the review in detail to both committees.

1.17. The LRSC recognised that to achieve an improved role in the tourism sector, things had to move forward and change. They fully supported the review recommendations.

1.18. The BRRS had broad support of the four recommendations but expressed some concern on the proposed loss of the Sussex by the Sea website and the detrimental impact that might have on attracting visitors to the town, even though it was acknowledged it was dated in its present format (e.g. the site doesn’t meet current accessibility standards) and other websites now served that function. The Chairman stated that the Council should reflect on its position regarding tourism and how this should be delivered. He was therefore of the view that the idea of developing a strategy alongside strategic partners and stakeholders made sense. There was further discussion regarding the possible impact of ceasing the Sussex by the Sea website and after being put to a vote the recommendations were not supported by the Subcommittee for this reason.

1.19. The Subcommittee’s views were sought to assist this Committee with their deliberations on the matter and consideration of the review recommendations.

<p>2.0. Experience West Sussex Partnership (EWSP)</p> <p>2.1. The partnership continues to collaborate and councils across West Sussex meet regularly to facilitate joint activities such as marketing and promotion.</p> <p>2.2. It offers the opportunity to work with other experts in the tourism and hospitality sector across the geographical area to increase awareness and funding opportunities. Discussions are taking place with the LEP for funding of around £100,000 for the tourism and hospitality sector. This will focus on digital tourism and extending the season.</p> <p>2.3. EWSP have also prepared a response, on behalf of its partners, to the Government's review to examine and assess the role, structure and performance of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) across England. The review will inform whether there may be a more efficient and effective model for supporting English tourism at the regional level, and if so, what that model may be. Recommendations will be presented to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport by summer 2021.</p>																	
<p>2. PROPOSAL(S):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Committee is asked to support the four strategic recommendations (also listed in para 1.14) contained within the Arun Strategic Review of Tourism (October 2020) - Appendix A 2. Approve the proposed changes to the service as described in the review recommendations. 3. Instruct officers to implement these changes. 																	
<p>3. OPTIONS:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To support the recommendations. 2. To not support the recommendations. 																	
<p>4. CONSULTATION:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Has consultation been undertaken with:</td> <td>YES</td> <td>NO</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Relevant Town/Parish Council</td> <td>YES</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Relevant District Ward Councillors</td> <td></td> <td>NO</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other groups/persons (please specify) 1 to 1 consultation with a range of key stakeholders.</td> <td>YES</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>			Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO	Relevant Town/Parish Council	YES		Relevant District Ward Councillors		NO	Other groups/persons (please specify) 1 to 1 consultation with a range of key stakeholders.	YES				
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<p>5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Financial</td> <td></td> <td>NO</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Legal</td> <td></td> <td>NO</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment</td> <td>YES</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act</td> <td></td> <td>NO</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sustainability</td> <td></td> <td>NO</td> </tr> </table>			Financial		NO	Legal		NO	Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment	YES		Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		NO	Sustainability		NO
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Sustainability		NO															

Asset Management/Property/Land		NO
Technology		NO
Other (please explain)		

6. IMPLICATIONS:

6.1. There are no financial implications – proposed changes would be facilitated within the existing budget.

6.2. Some service activities will cease however if these recommendations are supported. This may result in job roles and responsibilities changing. The usual statutory consultation processes will be applied if this is the case.

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:

The review recommendations improve and develop Arun's tourism service and our relationship with our regional partners.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix A – Arun Strategic Tourism Review