

# Scrutiny Briefing Note

The Tourism Scrutiny Panel have asked to monitor progress on the following issues. This briefing contains the latest position as at, 9 October 2020.

## Subject:

### Update for the Economic Strategy and Tourism Recovery from COVID-19

#### Economic Strategy - Background

The Economic Strategy, which covers tourism as a key sector for North East Lincolnshire (NEL), was scheduled to be refreshed in 2019 and as part of the process a Local Economic Assessment (LEA) was carried out to help update the baseline data for NEL's priority sectors.

The Tourism Scrutiny Panel, along with the Economy Scrutiny Panel, were involved at key stages in the LEA and consultation. A special joint meeting with the Economy Scrutiny Panel was held 4 February 2019 to determine the future approach. On 6 August 2019 a joint workshop with the Economy Scrutiny Panel considered interim findings.

Deadlines for the completion of the Economic Strategy were then extended with a view to it being completed and presented to Cabinet in May/June 2020, but when COVID-19 hit, there was a direct impact on its delivery, and it was not considered appropriate to continue the refresh exercise during such an uncertain and ever-evolving economic climate.

During COVID however, there has been a strong focus on supporting businesses through grants, advice and guidance, and there were also a number of measures and support put in place in the resort, some of which is outlined later in this briefing. A revised schedule for the Economic Strategy is to be confirmed which is likely to take us into 2021 whereupon we can look in more detail at the implications for tourism and the approach to be taken.

#### Tourism Recovery

The 'COVID journey' has been tracked by sector through the Council's Development & Growth board (D&G), which is made up of a range of private sector representatives. The Visitor Economy Services and Retail group (VESR) represents the tourism, retail and hospitality sectors and reports directly into the D&G.

A general business survey has been completed which received 350 responses, and Council officers are also collating government figures on furlough etc. Officers are also working with the D&G board on scenario planning and will be creating a recovery strategy which may form a bridge between the current and the next Economic Strategy. Partnership working also continues with both LEPs as they develop their respective recovery plans.

In terms of tourism recovery, the following is a month by month tracker produced by VESR, summarising specific feedback from the sector:

- **March:** Hotels have lost most international trade. Businesses diversifying where possible.



- **April:** Businesses desperate to get back to work but concerns over whether they can make it profitable. Grants have taken some of the initial panic away but concerns of closures are long term.
- **May:** Furlough cash coming in now which is a huge help. Retail wanting to get back open. Concerns over visitor economy and an increased chance of second wave once visitor movement allowed. Hospitality sector not expecting to get back to normal for some time.
- **June:** Retail can reopen from mid-June, concerns that people will not come out and that premises will be open with very little income, especially those who have been trading online. Also, financial concerns about staff accruing holiday while being furloughed. Buy Local scheme considered a great idea (Loyal to Local introduced by E-Factor).
- **June 25<sup>th</sup>:** Hospitality reopening 4<sup>th</sup> July, but guidance is challenging. Tourism sector coping well.
- **July:** Missing confidence, people can still shop online but people still cautious about going out. Reduced hours and opening days are making it difficult to make being open viable.
- **August:** Cleethorpes is operating with caution because of the number of visitors from areas that have had spikes. Promoting market stalls in Grimsby and Cleethorpes, encouraging new traders. Still desperate times for leisure industry and hoping there will be more support.
- **September:** Hospitality and tourism problem highlights that there has been no summer trade (Easter – end Sept). Feedback is that it has been a good August, but this may not be enough to see them through the winter. Crunch time will be next year – it will be the survival of the fittest. End Sept - Statement on reduced opening hours not good. Biggest disappointment is that it is going to extend for 6 months, and already working at 50% capacity, so by closing earlier it is going to cause a huge impact and will reduce to 30% capacity (tables booked from 7pm onwards cannot be reused). Concerns over the furlough scheme coming to an end at the end of October. Beginning to see Christmas cancellations, even for those that are under 6. Accommodation providers are also reporting being hit by the 'rule of 6'.

### Support Activity for Tourism during COVID

Despite the challenging and dynamic economic environment during COVID, especially for the tourism, hospitality and retail sector, Council tourism officers have been carrying out a wide range of activity to give support to businesses. The following is a selection of the ongoing activities:

- Across the recent £10K and £25K COVID grant schemes, approximately 477 grants totalling £6,120,000 were paid out to businesses who are in the tourism, hospitality and leisure sector (including sports). Discretionary grant funds were also awarded to the sector, including some local hotels.
- The most recent Humber LEP kickstarting tourism grant has had over 22 local businesses express an interest. We are currently awaiting feedback on which businesses have been successful.
- Through the Reopening High Streets Safely fund, a suite of free COVID safety materials were produced for businesses to use in their premises such as posters, signs and floor vinyls etc.
- In April/May 2020 a local Tourism Survey (receiving 56 responses) was conducted and this may be followed up with a second survey during October/November 2020 in partnership with Greater Lincolnshire and Visit Lincolnshire, which will allow us to measure the current state of the sector.
- We are working closely with tourism officers across Greater Lincolnshire and we have continued to provide updated guidance and information to businesses over the last six months which has been well received.



- There is a new advisor for E-factor for the Visitor Economy, and he is already really busy with enquiries about what support businesses can get. The Council will work with E-Factor to hold some informal sessions for businesses to gain access to support and guidance alongside some webinars. The first one is scheduled for 4 November at Cleethorpes Town Hall.
- We are also working closely with E-factor to support the borough-wide Loyal to Local campaign.
- Through DiscoverNEL's social media platforms, there has been an ongoing focus on local businesses and encouraging the public to support retail and the attractions in a safe manner.
- Although the majority of events have had to be cancelled, the Meridian Showground (MSG) was reopened with the necessary COVID safe measures put in place. The funfair leased the MSG during August in order to put on some family activity for the public to attend.
- The Coastal Communities funded 'Fall into Cleethorpes' event, planned for 10 October, was cancelled due to the evolving COVID situation. The tourism team has continued to work with local businesses however, to create a self-guided 'Monster Trail' to encourage families around the main shopping areas in the town. Shops will have autumn themed windows and a ceramic 'monster' to spot with entries culminating in a prize draw. A shop window competition will also be held. Both activities are aimed to highlight the shop local campaign.

### **Next Steps**

In terms of next steps, officers will be happy to engage with Scrutiny on any of the following proposed activities as required:

1. Tourism officers will start to develop a local tourism action plan, to align with the one which is currently being developed by the Greater Lincolnshire LEP, as part of the potential Tourism Zone application. The local tourism action plan will utilise intelligence, evidence and data that has been gathered over recent months.
2. Officers from across the Council are looking into how we can continue to support the economy in the absence of events, establishing a plan on the ways in which local people can support their economy.
3. Officers will plan the approach and timeline for a revised LEA as appropriate and taking into account the dynamic economic climate.

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