



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020

## **TOURISM AND VISITOR ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL**

**15<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 at 10.00 a.m.**

### **Present:**

Councillor Brookes (in the Chair)

Councillors Abel, Callison, Hyldon-King, Mickleburgh, Parkinson and Rogers

### **Officers in attendance:**

- Carolina Borgstrom (Assistant Director Operations)
- Mark Nearney (Assistant Director Housing)
- Drew Hughes (Relationship Manager)
- Lisa Logan (Strategic Lead Environment)
- Guy Lonsdale (Finance Group Manager)
- Helen Thompson (Investment Manager, Economy and Growth)
- James Trowsdale (Strategic Manager)
- Scott Snowden (Resort Manager)
- Sue Wells (Chief Executive, Lincs Inspire)
- Paul Windley (Scrutiny and Democratic Team Manager)

### **Also in attendance:**

- Councillor Callum Procter, Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Heritage and Culture

### **SPTVE.13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There was an apology for absence from Councillor Freeston for this meeting.

### **SPTVE.14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received in respect of any item on the agenda for this meeting.

## **SPTVE.15 MINUTES**

The minutes of the Tourism and Visitor Economy meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

With regards to SPTVE.6 of the tracking item a member asked for clarification in relation to the role of the Resort Manager, as they felt that there was a need to cover tourism in Grimsby and not just in Cleethorpes. The Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Heritage and Culture responded by informing the panel that the Resort Manager was appointed specifically for the resort of Cleethorpes. As for the rest of the borough including Grimsby town centre, there was now a Strategic Lead for Culture, James Trowsdale, who was responsible for bringing in events. The Portfolio Holder explained that a large number of events had been planned but, due to COVID, none of these have been able to go ahead over the last few months. However, on a positive note the Grimsby Master Plan had been approved at Cabinet yesterday, and demonstrated fantastic ambition for Riverhead Square and St James Square, which would put Grimsby on the map and encourage visitors and tourism in the town centre.

In addition to the point raised, the panel asked if there were any plans to bring back a bus station hub in Grimsby town centre, as this would also encourage tourism at all times of the day but specifically in the evening when it was important to feel safe. The portfolio holder reassured members that there were plans to enhance the bus station and provide more bus stops to allow a more coordinated approach.

At SPTVE.8 of the tracking item, a member asked if any further consideration had been given to removing the charge for the Market Hall toilets in Grimsby town centre. There was a particular concern that a lot of elderly people came to the town centre purely for the market and would have to walk further into Freshney Place to access a free toilet. The Chair requested that the Portfolio Holder raise this with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Skills and Housing and provide an update to the member directly.

## **SPTVE.16 QUESTION TIME**

There was a question from a member of the public which was read out as follows:

*Please could I make a request to the scrutiny committee regarding the interpretive display panel located adjacent to the Brew Stop cafe on the Cleethorpes foreshore walk?*

*I understand it was an initiative by the former Cleethorpes Borough Council which was a pioneer among local authorities in seeking to highlight the potential of birdwatching tourism to the resort.*

*The panel originally contained illustrations of various species of shorebird that spend time feeding on the beach during migration. However, with the passage of years the images and text have eroded.*

*The panel is now just a collage of stains. As such, it is both a lost opportunity to promote the rich birdlife of the foreshore and an unfavourable reflection on the local authority.*

*My request is for the panel to be restored. If the original images have been lost, I understand the artist still lives in Cleethorpes and would presumably be able to replace them.*

*The text perhaps needs updating, but, if required, I would be happy to do that at no cost.*

*Some financial outlay would be involved, but possibly this might come from the funding for art installations partly allocated to projects on North Promenade.*

*Failing restoration, the panel would best be removed altogether.*

In response to this request, the panel were advised that the Resort Manager, Scott Snowden, was reviewing all of the signage along the beach with old signage being removed from Wonderland to the Fitties, and one of the main focuses of the new signage currently being planned was on the wildlife and nature that was along our coastline, especially wading birds. Interpretation boards were planned along with information about the designations and importance of the beach to help educate visitors and residents in the hope that it would be valued, respected, and therefore protected more. Currently the signage we have was all different, with no identity or uniformity. The new signage would have a running theme and standardisation but what exactly would be on the signs was yet to be agreed. Input from the RSPB had been sought and the offer from Mr Wright was appreciated and we may well be in touch when we get to that stage.

Members wished to thank Mr Wright for taking the time to contact the panel with this matter and were pleased to hear that the Resort Manager was taking the request seriously. The panel felt that if the signage could not be refurbished promptly, then to avoid further embarrassment for the Council the signage should be temporarily removed. In addition to this, Councillor Mickleburgh offered his services and knowledge to have a sign created on the history of the Pier.

## **SPTVE.17 FORWARD PLAN**

The panel received the current Forward Plan and members were asked to identify any items for examination by this Panel via the pre-decision call-in procedure.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan be noted.

## **SPTVE.18 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY**

The panel received a report from the Director for Communities tracking the recommendations of the Tourism and Visitor Economy Scrutiny Panel.

At SPTVE.27, from the 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017 on Statutory Libraries, the panel asked that this item remain on tracking until such time as a response had been received on the future plans for Grimsby Library.

RESOLVED – That the tracking report be noted, and items SPTVE.10 (Resort Manager) and SPTVE.8 (Public Conveniences update) be removed from future reports.

## **SPTVE.19 PRIORITIES FOR THE RESORT MANAGER**

The panel received a briefing note to update on the progress and priorities for the Resort Manager.

Mr Snowden gave a presentation to the panel covering details of short and long term plans for his role. Mr Snowden had been in post for approximately seven months and had big plans for the resort. However, due to COVID, he had spent most of his time conducting detailed risk assessments and operational responses to the pandemic. Mr Snowden and his team had spent a lot of time visiting and speaking with local businesses to ensure they were compliant and fully informed on the latest guidelines. During this time with local businesses, Mr Snowden explained that he had received a number of complaints about anti-social behaviour on the water, particularly jet skis. In response he had implemented a new system for the public to obtain access to the slipway and strong measures were being put in place to tackle the issue. He explained to the panel that his intention was to bring Cleethorpes into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century by updating and even replacing the slipway access for a more robust system which could also create revenue for the council. Paddle boarding and jet ski usage had seen growth this season and Mr Snowden wanted to encourage this with the ambition of providing foot washing facilities and disabled access.

As touched upon earlier in the meeting, a comprehensive review was being undertaken of all signage across the resort which was found to be varied, tired and disjointed. Mr Snowden was hoping to review and replace all signed with a fresh new look and was aiming to have this completed by next season.

Mr Snowden advised members that he felt the council was only tapping into a small proportion of the resort's potential for outdoor events, as a result he has reenergised the Beach Safety's Facebook page and had regular posts put out to encourage and engage with followers. One particular post reached a staggering 338,000 people, which demonstrated the power of social media. Again, due to COVID, Mr Snowden's plans had

been thwarted this year, but he was hopeful that next year would be different.

Lastly Mr Snowden informed members that he was keen to increase tourism to the area during winter months and was hoping to achieve this through eco-tourism; he was currently working with National England, Environment Agency, the RSPB and other agencies to take this forward.

The panel welcomed the update from Mr Snowden and was excited to see how all these plans developed over the coming months, especially on eco-tourism. The Chair invited Mr Snowden and Ms Logan back to the panel in the spring.

RESOLVED –

1. That the briefing note and update be noted.
2. That the Resort Manager and Strategic Lead Environment be invited back to a future meeting of this panel, in spring, 2021.

## **SPTVE.20 CULTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND**

The panel considered a briefing note on the Culture Development Fund's "Grimsby Creates".

Mr Trowsdale gave a presentation on the Cultural Development Fund which provided members with a background on where 'Grimsby Creates' came from and the £20m fund designed to support culture-led growth in English towns and cities outside of London, one of which being Grimsby. Mr Trowsdale explained the ambition for Grimsby and the four different strands of activity which would complete the programme, summarised as follows:

- Creative workspace – this covered the key elements of the proposal. The plan was to regenerate up to six heritage buildings on Grimsby's dockside Kasbah area into creative workspaces. Detailed designs were being worked on and should be available by January 2021.
- Business development – this strand was focused on supporting the local creative sector. A tender had been completed for a provider specifically for creative sector support, the supplier was to be announced in November. In addition to this, we were collaborating with East Streets Arts to provide creative development support and training opportunities to build people's capacity and skills.
- St James Square – supporting the ongoing development works, the Cultural Development Fund providing £260k for the creative and events elements of the project. They had ensured that the right infrastructure would be in place to host events and added a creative flair to the design which had included working with two artists whose artwork would be displayed in the area.

- Creative programme – bringing an ambitious programme of projects of a certain scale to the area, including activities, events, festivals, and public art to animate the town centre.

Mr Trowsdale advised the panel of the work ongoing to promote the programme, by engaging with the local sector and bringing together artists and organisations. Mr Trowsdale finished by summarising some of the other good news stories which have been in the media recently related to the Cultural Development Fund.

The panel welcomed the update and thanked Mr Trowsdale for the detailed presentation and were excited to see the plans come to fruition.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

## **SPTVE.21 QUARTER 1 FINANCE MONITORING REPORT**

The panel received a report from the Director of Resources and Governance providing key information regarding the Council's provisional financial outturn at quarter one.

Mr Lonsdale highlighted the key points and areas of concern within the report, explaining that the finances had been significantly impacted by COVID and an overspend of £1.7m was being reported despite receiving an additional £11.2m of funding from Government. On a positive note, details of the compensation scheme had been agreed and we were expecting funds back from government to cover reduced income on fees and charges during the lockdown period. The capital programme was also progressing well and projects had been able to move forward. Mr Lonsdale noted that there was a great deal of uncertainty going forward specially around the collection fund (collection of council tax etc), but a clearer picture should be available at quarter 2.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

## **SPTVE.22 LIBRARIES**

The panel received a verbal update from the Chief Executive of Lincs Inspire on the operational effects of Covid-19 on library services.

Mrs Wells started by thanking Mr Trowsdale for the funding which had been secured by for Lincs Inspire via the Government Cultural Development Fund recently and informed members that this money would be spent protecting the Grimsby Auditorium between now and spring while the building was unable to host large scale events. Mrs Wells advised members that the Auditorium had also achieved the Silver Award for 'attitude is everything', which was a status relating to disabled access.

With regard to libraries, Mrs Wells informed the panel that libraries were open for business and they had fully complied with government

guidance to ensure both staff and customers were safe. Mrs Wells stated that there was a very different feel to libraries since COVID and that customers were now encouraged to use the services and move on to allow others to also use the services. The prospect of weekend opening was being considered, but there had been a big adjustment for staffing duties and roles and how resources had to be managed, which also needed to be considered. An example of this was when a book was returned to the library it then had to be quarantined for 72 hours before it would be placed back on the shelves. While the libraries were closed, the online services were developed and the success, response and feedback had been brilliant. It was recognised that although at the start of lockdown a number of books may have been taken out, it simply wasn't enough for avid readers and therefore a click and collect service was implemented where customers could order books from an online catalogue and library staff would arrange for books to be collected from the library doors. In addition to this, a personal shopper service also took off as it was acknowledged that not everyone had access or could use the internet, so customers could call the library and give details of authors or books they liked and the staff would select an array of books for them to collect. This had been very successful and was continuing at present as some customers were still not comfortable with coming into the library. Mrs Wells explained that during the lockdown the shelves could not be replenished with new stock as suppliers were closed, and therefore they saw an increase of audio books, e-mags, e-newspapers and e-comics, and in the last month alone e-mags had seen an increase of 102% and audio books had seen an increase of 216% since they first became available. The services had been very successful and would continue to be made available.

In the absence of activities being able to take place at the libraries, online activities had been put in its place including daily teasers, competitions, online crafts and currently the Alice in Wonderland book was being read chapter by chapter on YouTube for viewers to sit and enjoy. The ICT services which the library provide were still available and had been spaced out accordingly around the venues. Mrs Wells informed the panel that a new demand had come of libraries during the pandemic and that was for printing and converting documents to 'PDFs'. This had been a great service for the library and was bringing a different audience into the buildings, which Mrs Wells believed was very positive. Lastly on libraries, Mrs Wells explained to members that recently work had been ongoing to build a partnership with the British Library and colleagues in Hull about raising the profile of a new business service which was available called COBRA (Complete Business Reference Advisor). This was a new service that contained all the information and resources someone needed to turn an idea into a business, including free advice and guidance. This was a valuable service for new businesses of any size and the project would raise the profile of COBRA. In response to a question on a previous item, Mrs Wells confirmed that the Archives was open for business with measures in place to keep staff and customers safe, only one visitor was allowed in at any time, and

again reference material had to be quarantined once finished with for 72 hours.

Members were pleased to hear that weekend opening hours were being considered, as not everyone was able to access the library services during the week due to work commitments. Members were also pleased to hear how online services had developed to meet the needs of service users, but also concerned for those who didn't have internet access. The panel hoped that the phone and personal shopper service would continue, and that the library would continue to operate hybrid options. Mrs Wells informed the panel that the home delivery service, ran by volunteers, had also started up again and would continue so long as the availability of volunteers continued.

In response to a question regarding the future of Grimsby library, the Portfolio Holder informed the panel that following the approval of the Grimsby Masterplan at Cabinet the day before, there would be a £25m investment for the town centre, which would include regeneration of the central library to expand the usage of the floors for innovation and learning centres. Following this announcement, the panel agreed that the previous request to have the library service remain on tracking could be superseded and the item could now be removed, with the caveat that the monitoring of the improvement to the Grimsby library be added to the panel's work programme.

RESOLVED –

1. That the update be noted.
2. That item SPTVE.27 (future of statutory library services in North East Lincolnshire) of the tracking report, now be removed.

## **SPTVE.23 ECONOMIC STRATEGY AND RECOVERY UPDATE**

The panel considered a briefing paper on the Economic Strategy and Tourism Recovery following Covid-19.

The Chair thanked Mrs Thompson for a comprehensive paper and presentation and welcomed the updates and detail it provided. Mr Windley asked the panel following the update if they would be happy to remove the item SPTVE.40 - A Strategic Approach to Tourism in North East Lincolnshire from tracking but in its place would add the monitoring of the local tourism action plan to the panel's work programme.

RESOLVED –

1. That the update be noted.
2. That item SPTVE.40 (A Strategic Approach to Tourism in North East Lincolnshire) be removed from tracking, and that the monitoring of the local tourism action plan be added to this panel's work programme.

## **SPTVE.24 PLAYING PITCH PROVISION**

The panel received a briefing paper on playing pitch strategy investment proposals in advance of the anticipated decision by Cabinet on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

## **SPTVE.25 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

There were no questions for the portfolio holder at this meeting.

## **SPTVE.26 CALLING IN OF DECISIONS**

There were no formal requests from members of this panel to call-in decisions taken at recent meetings of Cabinet.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 12.06 p.m.