

TOURISM & LEISURE REPORTS October 2020

4. TOURISM FUNCTION UPDATE

By Caroline Darlington, Tourism Manager

The Visit Weston tourism team remains in contact with one another throughout each day and we conduct video Zoom meetings on a regular basis, reporting into the Assistant Town Clerk in order to maintain good communication, morale and senior management support. We have solidified our contact with Visit Weston Partners and other businesses in Weston in order to offer increased support to them during such uncertain times.

During June we updated the Tourism Team Plan. The tourism team recognises its role within Weston Town Council, which identifies us as an ambitious organisation that wants to do all it can to make our town a better place to live, work and visit. The team takes pride in preserving and promoting the town's rich and unique history as a Victorian seaside town and seeks to support the new Town Council Strategy's five pillars of key objectives.

- (1) Weston View – measures to promote and better present the town.
- (2) Cleaner and Greener – measures to improve the local environment
- (3) Healthier and Happier – measures to promote health and wellbeing
- (4) A Bright Future – measures to support and enhance the local economy
- (5) Heritage, Arts and Culture – measures to ensure that the town thrives as a vibrant place for arts and culture.

The above objectives are being held in consideration when meeting with NSC's Place Agency.

It is hoped that a new location for the VIC will be an integral part of future planning. We also hope that the economic cost reduction strategy put into operation during 2020, resulting in a saving of at least £32,000, (approximately £25,000 has been saved on seasonal staff budget and there has been zero expenditure on the budget of £7,000 for retail stock).

Officers would hope that these savings can be considered for the next financial year in order to recommence providing civic pride in the re-establishment of a thriving VIC. Members comments would be welcomed.

4.1 Events – Placemaking

Visit Weston has been invited to participate in the **Place Agency advisory team** and has attended one Zoom meeting, with the next one scheduled for early October. This is a collaborative effort, the first task being to produce an events calendar which is currently being populated. Visit Weston has made it clear that the challenge with this remains, as it always has been, that events are not published with sufficient advance notice to market them effectively. Therefore it has been agreed that Visit Weston's recommendations for event publicising will be included in the calendar, giving deadline suggestions

such as in early January, events for February half term and Valentine's Day are published. Details of how to upload events to the Visit Weston website will also be included.

4.2 Visitor Information Calls

The online and telephone enquiries to our 'Virtual VIC' (in lieu of the centre being open to the public) have remained consistent throughout the reporting period, with the most frequently asked questions being "what's open", "where can we park and how do we pay" and recommendations for places to stay. The phone diverted to the Tourism Manager from 20th March 2020 until 13th September 2020 and from that date to the Tourism Marketing Officer.

With the phones being on permanent divert, calls can come in at any time of day and seven days a week. At the initial lockdown, up to 60 calls a day were being dealt with, this has now reduced to an average of 10 a day.

There is still much interest in visiting Weston-super-Mare with holidaymakers and day-trippers contacting us to enquire about accommodation, information on public amenities and any local Covid-related restrictions.

Ongoing correspondence with our VW Accommodation partners, has shown very little reduction in demand for their hotels, self-catering properties and camping/caravan sites, despite the cancellation of large events including the Beach Race, Fireworks on the Pier and Carnival.

Interestingly, we have also seen a spike in the number of enquiries in relation to outdoor pursuits; horse riding, the Old Town Quarry, routes through Weston Woods and other established trails and walks. This increase could be attributed to a desire to enjoy the area with easier social distancing in mind, as made mention of in the printed poster content as part of the Pear Communications campaign.

4.3 Support for Visit Weston Partners

There have been some losses during the pandemic. The Blitz Tearoom for example, being so small, could not open safely whilst keeping distance between tables. Somerset Speedway has not been able to open. The Seaward Hotel will not open until 2021 so we hope this will be a temporary loss. Through our constant efforts to remain in contact, although it's disappointing and not unexpected that some businesses were not able to open, the fiscal damage has been limited and contained quite successfully.

It was reported at last Committee that two of our Platinum Plus partners, The Lewinsdale Lodge and Wookey Hole indicated their intent to cancel all advertising and they approached us to negotiate a reduction. With agreement from the Town Clerk we offered them 3 months free, and we are pleased to say that both have now indicated that they will renew after all.

• Visit Weston Partners Prior to Lockdown with current Partners shown in brackets

Membership	Membership	Membership	Membership	Membership
Bronze £150	Silver £250	Gold £350	Platinum £500	Platinum Plus £700
27 (23)	15 (11)	13 (10)	17 (14)	9 (9)

We have conducted two Zoom meetings over the reporting period with the accommodation partners and another is planned for October. These were well received, with proprietors of businesses assisting one another with advice and experiences after re-opening and appreciative of the advice from Visit Weston on methods of keeping guests and staff safe, applying for grants and general disaster recovery.

One of our long-standing Platinum partners, the owners of 3 separate up-market self-catering establishments, has opened a house plant shop next to Lloyds Bank on South Parade. The Tourism Manager visited them on their opening day and published details on Visit Weston Facebook. So far, this has been a successful venture and has attracted many visitors from throughout the town, with one customer stating that she would now explore more of the town centre as a result of finding this independent new shop. We wish them every success.

A local brewer, RCH in Hewish, has taken a free banner ad on the home page of Visit Weston with the aim in mind to sell their products to self-catering and caravan site guests. They are extremely pleased with the number of clicks received to their own website and it is hoped that they will become full members at the end of the free term.

4.4 Visit Weston Partnership Working and Initiatives

In line with our philosophy of cross-agency working, the Tourism Team has continued to embrace opportunities to solidify and increase our relationships with other stakeholders, associations and North Somerset Council to mutual advantage.

- **Communications**

We have remained in constant contact with NSC's Communications Team with regard to jointly issuing messages to announce news relevant to the visitor economy such as the postponement of the Beach Race until 2021.

The Tourism Manager met with NSC's **Economic Development Team** to discuss forward plans for events and it was indicated that they will rely on Visit Weston to broadcast any such information as our reach is far greater than theirs.

- **Tourism**

In mid-July, once local attractions, bars and restaurants had been permitted by central government to re-open, we emailed a colourful news release to 256 coach companies from our database of all coaches that visited in 2019 to advise that Weston-super-Mare is open for business. It is interesting to note that the coaches have become much more luxurious and their passenger demographic is not restricted to the elderly, the mix now includes younger people and families with higher disposable income than has been the tradition. Coach companies have had to increase their prices as they must run with 50% capacity in order to maintain social distancing, so the average is 30 passengers.

The unfortunate increase in Covid-19 cases has resulted in local lockdowns in the Birmingham area and total lockdown in parts of Wales, both areas being our bread-and-butter suppliers of tourists.

A new Director of Operations has been appointed by **The Grand Pier** from Brighton Pier. Michelle Michael has requested a meeting between him and the Tourism Manager and this has been scheduled by Zoom.

Seafront & Events Team

We remain in contact on a daily basis with this team and as a result, at their request, the news release to coach companies was also sent to them as they wished to advise the franchisees on the seafront that this had been done.

- **The BID and Town Centre Partnership**

The BID have come out of furlough, but although the Tourism Manager sits on their steering committee, there have been no meetings since last report. We are in contact with both staff of the BID so that we all remain up to date.

- **UKTIC Forum**

Visit Weston takes the lead with the Southern UKTIC Forum and we have conducted one Zoom meeting during the lockdown. We plan another for November and find this a very useful and supportive forum for picking up ideas on disaster recovery and general operational matters.

- **Public Relations, Press Releases and Media**

Since lockdown on 20th March 2020 the Tourism Manager used her own initiative to source and create a list of journalists, news editors, TV stations, Radio stations and other media as this was lacking on the town council's database and NSC advised that their press list was out of date. Based on this research, Visit Weston composed and distributed Press Releases to our own list and as a result, in March and April alone there were over 40 news stories published or broadcast with interviews with the Tourism Manager, including:

The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, Western Daily Press

BBC Radio Bristol, BBC Radio West Midlands, Radio 5 Live, Radio Wales

Sky News, BBC News, Channel 4, ITV News, Points West, Channel 5 News

Press coverage continued throughout May and June with all inquiries passed to NSC whilst the the Tourism Manager was in mourning. Cllrs Canniford and Bell and many Westonian businesses were interviewed as a direct result of introductions by the Tourism Manager, whose mobile number is first point of call for all of the media on our new contact list. The town council's other services were also promoted and interviews offered to other service managers where the story was appropriate.

This produced valuable and positive media coverage for Weston-super-Mare that was worth thousands of Pounds, the council could not have afforded this "advertising" if we had to pay for

it. It reached worldwide audiences with the Sky News broadcast seen in the USA, Caribbean, Germany and Australia to our knowledge. It also was syndicated to the New York Times.

Now that we have this valuable relationship with the media, Visit Weston is keen to keep the momentum going and would ask Members to feed into us any stories that they feel to be newsworthy, particularly in regard to the visitor economy.

It must be kept in mind that, occasionally, media opportunities happen at very short notice. On Saturday 18th July we received a call from BBC Radio West Midlands who were following the first coach trip to Weston from Birmingham. Richie Anderson, a very well-known Radio personality with millions of followers, tracked them all the way from pick-up in Brum to WsM and called with 10 mins notice to ask if we could board the coach on arrival to welcome them on arrival.

Visitor Information Centre

With agreement from Committee, the VIC was not able to be open for Summer 2020. This was a sensible decision, if a disappointing one. However, it has fitted with an economic cost reduction strategy that was started at Full Town Council in early 2020 and substantial savings have been made.

In addition to the savings mentioned earlier in this report, we would suggest that as the VIC has not been occupied, we should not be billed for NNDR, a budget of £3,500 was set aside for this and **we would welcome comments and opinions from Members on this issue.**

Report to the Tourism and Leisure Committee – October 2020

Destination Website and Marketing Campaigns – Visit Weston-super-Mare

Report written by Emma Williams, Tourism Marketing Officer

4.4 Website News and Updates

The Visit Weston website has been continuously receiving new and refreshed content during July and August. We have used the site as the foundation of all updates and information pertaining to Covid-19 recovery and how it has impacted on the visitor economy, including a large project compiling all 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme participants in the town, as well as creating unique pages for the information.

To further support the local economy, we have offered a number of free Banner Advertisements on the VW Website. This offer was taken up by three local businesses, a local brewery, a private chef and a family-ran bakery.

These have received an encouraging number of impressions and converted 'click-throughs' to their own websites or social media pages – averaging around 35,000 impressions per month; an average of over 100,000 impressions of free advertising for these local businesses during the three-month offer period.

As explained in previous committee reports, measures pertaining to accessibility legislation (WCAG 2.0) continue across the Visit Weston site in consultation with Simpleview, and assessments being made into 'grading' the site's compliance and ease of use. Simpleview have used Visit Weston's adoption of their 'Audio Eye Pro' accessibility solution, as part of their own advertising, demonstrating its facilities and cost-effectiveness to their other DMO customers.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Website Statistics

The Visit Weston-super-Mare website visitor numbers and page views are reported below for

The reporting period:

Period	Visitors	Page Views	New Visitors	Top 10 Visitor IP address locations
1 st July – 31 st August	91,613	210,843	85.7%	1. London 2. Bristol 3. (not set) 4. Birmingham 5. Weston-super-Mare 6. Cardiff 7. Coventry 8. Taunton 9. Bridgwater 10. Walsall
(2019)	(107,207)	(250,489)	(83.7%)	

The data shows a 15% reduction in traffic versus 2019, which given the 80% drop in traffic the site suffered in April, is an encouraging improvement amidst the global tourism circumstances.

Top Ten Visited Website Pages 1st July– 31st August 2020

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Home Page | 6. Eat Out to Help Out |
| 2. Things to Do | 7. Sand Bay Beach |
| 3. Attractions | 8. What's On |
| 4. Car Parking | 9. Weston Beach |
| 5. Covid-19 Blog Info | 10. Dog Friendly Weston |

Social Media News and Update

The social media analytical data for Facebook and Twitter during the reporting period is recorded as: Total Impressions: 109,227. This figure shows the number of times Visit Weston social media content has been seen by unique user accounts.

Unfortunately, there are ongoing difficulties with Instagram's 'Insights' facility; whereby historic user data is not retained on the site's interface, making analytics harder to track unless constantly monitored on an almost daily basis. During this traditional time of year for staff annual leave in the reporting period, it has been too time-consuming to track recent Instagram data. However, this will be closely monitored in the future to ensure accurate information for further reporting periods, as before.

We have had a number of effective and engaging Facebook posts during July and August, aimed primarily at supporting VW Partners. These have included a large campaign promoting the Eat Out to Help Out scheme across the town and a number of accommodation partners' offers and initiatives.

We were also granted permission to the best first organisation to share the 'Welcome to Weston' video produced by The Sovereign Centre and Weston College. This proved to be very popular content, with the video being seen on our Facebook post 18,000 times.

At the time of writing this report (25/09/20) we have 5,022 followers on Facebook, after having reached the 5000 followers milestone at the start of September. This brings our Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram follower total up to 10,179 accounts.

4.5 Destination Marketing Campaigns

After taking up the offer of supplementary marketing resources from Pear (as detailed in the last committee report) Visit Weston now features on a number of printed A3 posters in more Motorway Service Areas across the country, most of which are additional to the original twelve sites agreed at the start of the campaign. Here is an image of some of this content displayed in the northbound Strensham (M5) Services, by the public toilets.



The text copy was amended from that featured on the postcards to ensure the poster is effective as a stand-alone advertisement. We opted for a light-hearted message that also highlights consumers' concerns over safety and responsibility, post-Covid.

"If you're reading this, chances are you're on the road. Instead of taking the road to nowhere, head to Junction 21 on the M5, the road to beachfront paradise at Weston-super-Mare.

You'll find lots of space on our miles of clean and sandy beaches, plenty of fresh air and safe, family fun for everyone. Even Wendy the Donkey is out of furlough and back to trotting furlongs! Sounds good, right?"

Pear Communications have also chosen to use our campaign as part of their own marketing material, as published online and shown here, on their website:

Pear Out of Home Specific for Your Needs

*Our Out of Home service is specific for Tourism, Arts & Events... so we have chosen outlets that will **increase the effectiveness of your reach and reduce wastage per £ spent.***

Your Out of Home creatives will be placed in the **right sites for you.** This will maximise impact and ensure that your OTS statistics are at their most effective; directed at your target audience resulting in a **greater ROI and ticket sales.**

Simply put... if you're a garden attraction... use our Garden Centre network: **Blue Diamond, Dobbies, Hilliers and Wyevale.** If you're a family attraction... we will display you in **Morrisons, Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's plus Holiday Parks** and other family attractions! We will not waste your money in sites that won't work.



What our clients are saying about us...

**"Our lovely new destination marketing is ready for prospective holidaymakers up and down the land!
We picked up these at Hopwood Park services.
Huge thanks to Pear for all their hard work and support with our latest campaign"**

Emma Williams, Visit Weston-super-Mare

The Visit Weston website page set up to accompany the campaign, and is accessed exclusively by scanning our postcard's unique QR code, is receiving visitors and continues to be monitored.

There are no further Destination Marketing campaigns being planned at this time.

Possible Brochure

Since the cross-departmental Council's directive for 2020 was not to proceed with publication of a paper visitor guide, and following the recent announcement surrounding the financial instability of Archant, the parent company of the Weston and Worle Mercury, consideration should be given to the creation of an alternative town map, dependent on the reopening of a Visitor Information Centre to distribute from in 2021. Costs would need to be carefully scrutinised and included in the budgets for 2021/22 should Members wish to explore the option of an in-house publication.

Tourism & Leisure Committee, Grounds Update Report – Monday 5 October 2020

Fay Powell – Grounds Manager

Waterpark

The Grounds Manager has been working with the head Groundsman and the Community & Grounds Officer, reviewing and identifying things which need to be repaired or replaced in the waterpark. Somerset Wood Recycling have repaired the vandalism we sustained over the lock down period to the castle structure. A plan for new signs to be installed is underway.

As with all other parks, it is open to the public to use but free of charge.

Play Areas & Open Spaces

A verbal report by the Grounds Manager will be given at the meeting regarding Dartmouth Close and West Wick.

On the 15th July the Grounds Manager, Head Groundsman and Community and Grounds Officer visited each park to re-open them to the public, installing all signs needed to be COVID compliant. All play areas have their own individual Covid-19 Risk Assessments. All play areas had their sq. footage measured, equipment within those sites measured and an allowance as to how many people can safely be in the play areas at any one time has been calculated. This has been documented on signage at each site and uploaded to our website.

Conniston Green Play area has been well received by the local residents. They were especially pleased to see the rocket ship remain in place. Marc Graham the Chef Executive for the For All Healthy Living Centre said:

“I just wanted to pass on my thanks for the way in which you have listened to local voices and retained the rocket, and indeed refurbished it, and the overall improvement to the play surface and equipment. It is a delight when a statutory agency carries out a process where local consultation is taken seriously and responded to in a positive way. The park looks great and is already being fully used by local children.”

Throughout lock down we received substantial vandalism to Uphill Junior and Senior play areas. Somerset Wood Recycling will be replacing all the fencing at both parks and replacement parts have been ordered for damaged equipment.

Members are requested to:

- Note the report