

# TOURISM AND LEISURE COMMITTEE – 27<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2020

## PROPOSAL FOR A WESTON PLACE AGENCY

### REPORT OF THE TOWN CLERK

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#### North Somerset Council's Placemaking Project

As members are aware, North Somerset Council (NSC) has employed consultants led by Turner Works to support it to refresh its vision and strategy for 'placemaking' in Weston. This will include a set of projects across the town for development, active travel, skills, employment, workspace, health and wellbeing, culture and public space.

The project has engaged with local people and discovered a powerful feeling of pride and optimism about the future. People want to talk about their hopes for Weston and have expressed a desire to be involved. It has also uncovered disenchantment about closing shops, empty sites and a feeling of a lack of progress on regeneration. These concerns reflect the reality of financial value and viability. NSC also believe Weston's 'brand' is currently weak. Not only does Weston's 'brand' need to be stronger, it needs to be deployed to speak to a wider audience that can come and invest in Weston either as place to live, to visit, to study or to run a business.

NSC point out that Weston has a Town Council, a Chamber of Commerce, a Business Improvement District, a Town Centre Partnership, a Civic Society, a Culture Company and is the base for North Somerset Council. It has influential business figures and institutions. All have views and all have assets and resources. It is therefore proposed to use the Placemaking Strategy as a new vision for Weston, setting up a Place Agency with a Board and Project Teams. The ambition of Weston Place Agency could be:

- Leadership across organisations that have a strategic, economic and cultural impact on the town
- Agreement of a set of common objectives and priorities for Weston and its future
- Pooled resourcing for generating and editing content for communications activities
- Strategic planning for greater coordination of event programming across the town
- Rationalised online presence to promote Weston using a new shared place identity

The 'online estate' is said to be of patchy quality and could benefit from rationalisation of footprint and content, and consolidation of target audiences. Therefore, North Somerset Council has been exploring whether there is scope for a single place-based online platform that broadcasts Weston and its constituent assets and opportunities to existing and prospective visitors, shoppers, residents, businesses and investors.

This single online platform would use the place identity prepared by Burgess and Beech and NSC suggest that it could replace the websites but still promote the interests and content of the following assets:

- The Tropicana
- The Sovereign Centre
- The Business Improvement District
- Visit Weston
- Town Quarry
- NSC pages on regeneration

It is suggested by NSC officers that 'one option' is that Weston Town Council's Visit Weston is used as the basis and with some development could become the platform and back-end structure for the new site.

## **Commentary**

These proposals could require a significant redesigning of existing resources and will need careful consideration by this council. I am aware that members may have widely differing views and am writing this report to seek direction from councillors on how to respond to them. In order to assist debate, I would like to cover a number of issues which arise.

Firstly may I suggest that the Town Council should welcome NSC's renewed interest in improving the town, whether it is called 'regeneration' or 'placemaking', the town clearly faces economic challenges which need to be addressed by the unitary authority working with other key public and private sector bodies.

Secondly, there clearly is a lot of interest from businesses and other key players such as Weston College and the Town Centre Partnership/BID in this proposal. I would suggest that the Town Council as the only democratically elected body exclusively representing our town should in principle agree to take part in a Place Agency and to be in at the start to influence how the proposals are taken forward.

Thirdly, the proposals around rolling up Weston's online presence including Visit Weston should not be dismissed but do need careful consideration. A number of successful models are available where towns and cities have brought their online resources for different groups such as visitors, investors and residents together, such as Paisley, Kings Cross, Plymouth and Manchester.

Fourthly, I would suggest that the Place Agency needs to be more than a 'talk shop' which, while valuable, depends on the commitment of the people currently involved, who can change at any time. Therefore, my advice is that the ambition should be that within 2 years the Place Agency should be incorporated as a Community Interest Company, separate from both councils and other bodies, to ensure its independence and permanence.

Finally, NSC have proposed that Councillor Ian Porter and I should be the members of the board representing this council. I am happy, particularly in the planning and development stage, to attend meetings and use my knowledge and skills to represent the Town Council's interests and instructions and to gather information for report back to members. However, in principle I feel that elected members should normally be the board members on outside bodies, with officers as advisors. Therefore may I suggest the Town Council should make it clear that, at least in the medium term when the Place Agency becomes established, it must itself decide who its board members should be.

This report went to full Town Council on 20<sup>th</sup> July. Any outcome from Council will be reported verbally.

**Recommendations:** Members' instructions are requested.

Malcolm L Nicholson, LL.B (Hons), DMS, PSLCC  
Town Clerk  
17<sup>th</sup> July 2020

## 5. REPORT TO TOURISM & LEISURE COMMITTEE – 27<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2020

### Report of the Tourism Manager - Caroline Darlington

As we have been unable to convene a Tourism & Leisure Committee since February, we have compiled an interim report mainly covering the period from mid-March 2020 when the town council and Visit Weston commenced working from home, until the end of May 2020.

The VIC landline telephone is diverted to the Tourism Manager's mobile and to the Tourism Marketing Officer when the TM is unavailable. The line has become exceptionally busy since the government announced it to be permissible for visitors to travel any distance for exercise provided they could get back home on the same day. Calls have been from all over the country, but in the main from the Bristol and Midlands areas.

You will be aware that we temporarily re-branded as "Don't Visit Weston" (Yet) in mid-March. This resulted in a spike in our workdays with increased calls, emails and social media activity in particular. Telephone calls commence early in the day, from people considering whether to drive here, until late in the evening from people considering driving here the next day.

The Visit Weston tourism team is in contact with one another throughout each day and we conduct video Zoom meetings three times a week reporting into the Assistant Town Clerk in order to maintain good communication, morale and senior management support. We have found this to be highly beneficial especially as it gives us opportunity to remain up to date with the constantly changing rulings regarding lockdown as well as general information regarding the situation within Weston-super-Mare businesses, visitor numbers and VW Partners.

#### **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.

#### **Visit Weston Partners**

Bronze £150	Silver £250	Gold £350	Platinum £500	Platinum Plus £700
27	15	13	17	7

Accommodation	Attraction	Restaurant	Shopping
37	22	11	10

The majority of the VW partners closed their doors to the public on or around 20<sup>th</sup> March as they are attractions, restaurants, theatre and classified as non-essential by the Government. A few accommodation providers remain open to accommodate key workers if required. Visit Weston is in daily contact with them by phone, email and newsletter to update them with vital business information such as how to apply for government grants, how to stay safe if they are accommodating medical staff and any business support that we can offer.

As an example, we contacted all accommodation providers to advise that Visit Weston have registered with the command centre at Weston General Hospital in case they require accommodation. As a result, we have a list of partners who would be prepared to accommodate emergency workers and have publicised this on the Visit Weston Website and advised those partners on how they can apply. The support that we have given to our partners has been well received all round and we have had positive feedback.

Two of our Platinum Plus partners, The Lewinsdale Lodge and Wookey Hole have indicated that they have cancelled all advertising and have approached us to negotiate a reduction. With agreement from the Town Clerk we offered them 3 months free, this avoids complications for our Finance Department in making refunds.

Since that time, it was agreed by Group Leaders and the Chairman that we should offer a blanket 3 month goodwill reduction to all Partners whose renewal commences after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. This has been communicated to all and has been extremely well received. We are recommending that this is extended for a further three months.

We have also approached a number of local companies who are supporting Weston residents by delivering food and essential supplies to those who are self-isolated and shielded. The offer is a free three month banner advertisement on the website home page and has been taken up by Hills Bakery and a number of others are considering the option.

The aim of the above is to give support to local businesses and residents alike. A secondary offer has been made to those who select to extend their partnership to a one-year contract by extending a 20% discount for nine months.

The Royal Hotel is under a new management structure with an outside consultant, they have cancelled their renewal. However, during this difficult time, we have continued our dialogue with them and have supported them with publicity opportunities. It is hoped that they may reverse their decision in the future.

Regular phone-arounds are being made to Partners as this is a more personal way in which to reach them, especially at a time when emails have increased in number to all of us. As a result, we have an overview of developments in Weston's tourism sector.

During the course of writing this report, there have been a number of U-turns. Albany Lodge guest house, for instance, decided against accommodating key workers and NHS staff, preferring to remain closed to all guests. This is because they found it too risky to their own wellbeing, they could not guarantee that surfaces touched by guests were not missed during disinfection cleaning.

Hardest hit have been the larger hotel premises, those whose business rateable value is over £51,000 making them ineligible for government grants to the tourism and hospitality sector. Furloughed staff are often paid weekly and larger hotels are having to take up additional loans in order to make those payments on top of their other commitments. The Seaward Hotel has been forced to cancel their Partnership (Platinum) as the hotel is closed, has no income and cannot envisage being able to open during 2020. They will reconsider once the government relaxes lockdown.

Sand Farm Caravan Park in Sand Bay has been forced to cancel their renewal (at Bronze) as they have no income and are unable to apply for the Small Business Grant.

We are planning an online meeting with all Visit Weston Partners when there may be a better indication of the Government's plans regarding lockdown extensions. At this point we aim to discuss commencement of recovery plans, which will differ according to the nature and status of their businesses.

#### Communications

We have been in constant contact with NSC's Communications Team with regard to jointly issuing messages to solidify the Government's "Stay at Home" directive during the Coronavirus lockdown. NSC have praised the efforts of Visit Weston and we have agreed that they can use our content when issuing releases on behalf of the North Somerset region. Additionally, due a restructure within NSC, we have been approached by them for assistance with a 2-month project to inject some entertaining rather than educational social media engagement regarding cancelled events. We have been advised that they are relying on Visit Weston's help as our reach is greater than theirs.

#### Tourism

We have been in contact with NSC's Tourism Officer and supported her efforts to assist accommodation providers with information on how to approach the medical world for key-workers and NHS staff accommodation for those isolated or displaced from home. This is likely to develop into a disaster recovery programme that we can all buy into. We have circulated a questionnaire to all Visit Weston partners for their input regarding the economic impact of enforced closures that will be collated and sent to central government.

#### Seafront & Events Team

We remain in contact on a daily basis with this team and invited them to join in with TV interviews regarding keeping the beachfront safe. We offered to support them with issuing messages about dog walking on the beach being banned as usual, per a directive from the Leader of NSC, from 1<sup>st</sup> May until 30 September.

#### The BID and Town Centre Partnership

In order to protect their financial reserves, the BID and TCP have furloughed both staff members. Visit Weston remains in constant contact with Paul Batts, who is unpaid Chairman of the BID and an unpaid director of the TCP.

#### UKTIC Forum

Visit Weston takes the lead with the Southern UKTIC Forum. This met on 18<sup>th</sup> February in Taunton and was highly productive. Since lockdown, Visit Weston has contacted all members for input on how their regions are affected. All are working from home and we intend to instigate an online meeting forum as soon as the Government confirms that the peak of the crisis has been reached and a downward trend in Coronavirus is confirmed. This will be a meeting with one agenda point: disaster recovery for the tourism sector in the southwest.

We have been in touch with the southwest area representative for Visit England and have invited them to join in the next UKTIC Forum meeting.

#### Public Relations, Press Releases and Media

Over the last 4 years the Visit Weston team has retained contact details with a range of media, both from previous interviews and from researching for new avenues for press releases such as to travel trade newspapers and national press and TV.

The re-branding to “Don’t Visit Weston” was of course the diametric opposite of the positive destination marketing that would be the norm for Visit Weston. However, the resulting coverage went some way, we hope, to keeping the residents and key workers of Weston-super-Mare safe from outside visitors spreading the virus. This was the philosophy of the entire Visit Weston team and approved by the town clerk with no intent for personal or team aggrandisement.

We have advised NSC Comms team of any interviews planned and have assisted them with finding suitable candidates for interview according to the storyline that the researcher is tasked with. For example, a question about beach patrols resulted in NSC’s Seafront & Events Manager being interviewed.

With television interviews, it should be noted that these are almost always pre-recorded and therefore available to the producers to be edited. Mentions, for example, of the outreach programme being offered by the Weston Museum were cut and a one-hour interview was cut to 10 seconds on air.

Radio interviews are almost always live, so cannot be so drastically edited. Visit Weston were able to mention other town council services on air whilst discussing what the council is doing to get messages across to the public.

23<sup>rd</sup> March Changed Visit Weston Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to “Don’t Visit Weston”. Reached 43,631 people.

25<sup>th</sup> March Press release circulated by Visit Weston

26<sup>th</sup> March BBC Points West (with Cllr Mark Canniford)

26<sup>th</sup> March Weston Mercury

26<sup>th</sup> March The Bristol Post

27<sup>th</sup> March Somerset Live

30<sup>th</sup> March Somerset Live re-ran story with different imagery

2<sup>nd</sup> April Second press release circulated by Visit Weston

3<sup>rd</sup> April The Birmingham Post

3<sup>rd</sup> April ITV News online

3<sup>rd</sup> April The Bristol Post online

4<sup>th</sup> April BBC Points West evening news

4<sup>th</sup> April BBC Radio Somerset, the Simon Parkin breakfast show

4<sup>th</sup> April BBC Radio Bristol, the Ali Vowles breakfast show

6<sup>th</sup> April BBC Radio Bristol, the Emma Britton breakfast show

9<sup>th</sup> April Sky News, broadcast once in the day and throughout the evening.

9<sup>th</sup> April Visit Weston Facebook post “WsM Closed” sign reached 83,620

10<sup>th</sup> April Channel 5 TV evening news

10<sup>th</sup> April BBC Radio Bristol, the Emma Britton breakfast show

14<sup>th</sup> April BBC Points West interview with Paul Batts (The BID)

15<sup>th</sup> April Somerset Live

9<sup>th</sup> May Interview arranged for Nicki Slade, owner of The Royal Grosvenor hotel on Channel 4 Television news.

11<sup>th</sup> May Interview with national newspaper, the Telegraph published online

Interview with Clare Cavanagh, BBC Radio Bristol

	Interview published on BBC Online
12 <sup>th</sup> May	Interview with the Western Daily Press for publication either 13 <sup>th</sup> or 14 <sup>th</sup> May Interview with the Bristol Post for publication 13 <sup>th</sup> May in paper, 12 <sup>th</sup> May online Interview broadcast on BBC Breakfast national television at 07:10
13 <sup>th</sup> May	Daily Telegraph newspaper
14 <sup>th</sup> May	BBC Radio Bristol
15 <sup>th</sup> May	The Guardian newspaper
15 <sup>th</sup> May	Sky News, Dan Whitehead
20 <sup>th</sup> May	BBC TV News, Sarah Ransome (suggesting WsM open for business)
20 <sup>th</sup> May	BBC Radio Five Live, Sarah Ransome (correcting above)
20 <sup>th</sup> May	Somerset Live (passed to Grand Pier)
21 <sup>st</sup> May	BBC Radio Bristol
21 <sup>st</sup> May	BBC Radio Wales
21 <sup>st</sup> May	ITV West Country News (The Mayor, Lewinsdale Lodge)
22 <sup>nd</sup> May	BBC Radio West Midlands
22 <sup>nd</sup> May	Interview with Express & Star newspaper, Midlands, for publication 26 <sup>th</sup> May

Since the above timeline, Visit Weston has withdrawn from giving further interviews as we felt that we had reached a point where services such as car parking and the opening of seafront toilet blocks were better served by being answered by NSC. All leads and calls for interview have been passed to their Communications team, resulting in several interviews being conducted with Cllrs Bell and Canniford.

- **Covid-19 Support**

Both the Tourism Manager and the Tourism Marketing Officer were deployed to assist Weston Town Council Admin Team with collating and publicising lists of individuals, organisations and businesses who were available to help, particularly with those who are self-isolating. We provided the majority of data and supplemented this with contact details and methodology of obtaining their assistance. We also assisted with the design of posters and social media posts to distribute the information effectively to those in need.

## **Visitor Information Centre**

The planned opening date of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 was impossible. In mid-March we took the difficult decision to advise all 3 seasonal staff members who were due to start on 1<sup>st</sup> April that their services were not required until such time as the Government lifts lockdown on travel. The VIC has also been locked down, with all equipment disconnected from electricity supply.

It suffered a minor amount of flooding in March when the whole seafront flooded but this was contained and there was no permanent damage requiring insurance claims.

We are in constant touch with the NSC Seafront Team with regard to their plans for implementing a Lost Children and First Aid facility, which has traditionally been located within the VIC. They are reviewing the situation and have indicated that they will be obliged to deep clean and disinfect the VIC should they decide to open it for their services, as well conduct a thorough water flush through as none of the facilities has been used for some time.

As there is no SLA in place for 2020 they are not obliged to run these services from the VIC and are considering their position.

As the VIC has been closed since September 2019 there are no income or footfall figures to report.



## 5. REPORT TO TOURISM & LEISURE COMMITTEE – 27<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2020

Report of the Tourism Manager - Caroline Darlington Quarter 1 April – June 2020

### Visitor Information Centre

The planned opening date of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 was impossible. In mid-March we took the difficult decision to advise all 3 seasonal staff members who were due to start on 1<sup>st</sup> April that their services were not required until such time as the Government lifts lockdown on travel. The VIC has also been locked down, with all equipment disconnected from electricity supply.

There are notices in the window and on the Visit Weston website along with all social media platforms advertising our phone number, which is diverted to the TM's mobile phone and is answered 7 days a week.

A new 60" TV has been placed in the VIC window advertising all Platinum and Platinum Plus Partners giving updates on their opening, along with general information on staying alert and social distancing.

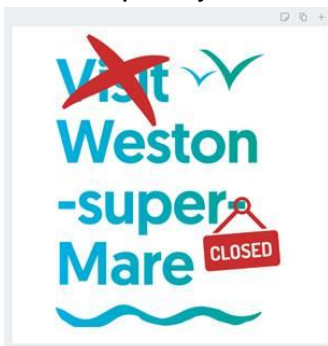
The VIC suffered a minor amount of flooding in March when the whole seafront flooded but this was contained and there was no permanent damage requiring insurance claims. The floor needs a deep clean from staining from sand and mud.

The NSC Seafront Team has confirmed that they will not implement a Lost Children and First Aid facility, which has traditionally been located within the VIC, so they will not be staffing the centre.

A series of risk assessments for opening the VIC during Covid-19 recovery has been implemented. These were modified each time the Government announced new advisories. The risk assessments have been inspected by the town council's advisors, Ellis Whittam, who confirm after a site visit that they are fit for purpose. At their advice, all risks were raised to the highest level, 9, and it was felt that the risk to staff and public remains at this level.

As the VIC has been closed since September 2019 there are no income or footfall figures to report

The temporary re-brand as "Don't Visit Weston" launched in mid-March and was run up until 4<sup>th</sup> June.



Visit Weston added "Don't" on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, the same day that the Prime Minister announced countrywide lockdown and introduced the "Stay at Home" message to the nation. On 10<sup>th</sup> May, the

Prime Minister announced the new message “Stay Alert” and permitted nationwide travel for exercise from the following Wednesday, 13<sup>th</sup> May.

Since introducing the “Don’t Visit Weston” social media banner on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, Visit Weston’s Facebook page received a significant increase in likes and followers. The “Don’t Visit” campaign was highly successful and resulted in regional, national and international television and radio interviews as well as national press coverage. The Tourism Manager was interviewed and broadcast on almost 30 occasions during April and May and introduced stakeholders to the media to supplement their stories. This included the Mayor, the BID along with a street warden, The Grand Pier, the Royal Grosvenor Hotel, The Royal Hotel, the Lewinsdale Lodge, the Victorian Café, NSC Seafront Team and Winston’s Fish Bar to give a broad view of the mix of businesses in Weston.

As soon as lockdown began to ease on 10<sup>th</sup> May, media and press interest developed new avenues that were more concerned with facilities operated by North Somerset Council, such as the opening of the beach, public toilets and car parking.

From that weekend, Visit Weston worked closely with NSC’s Communications/Press team and passed all press leads to them in order to maintain and respond to media inquiries. We stayed in close contact with their team so that both councils’ press and social media releases were guaranteed to send the same message.

On 11<sup>th</sup> May we were copied on email correspondence from Cllr Mark Canniford, in his roles as NSC’s Executive Member for Business, Economy and Employment, requesting that we maintain close contact with NSC on this matter, stating that it was in preparation for dropping the “Don’t” if we start to unlock.

Visit Weston staff have continually liaised with NSC press and seafront teams and have supported NSC’s efforts to manage the issues of high visitor numbers as a result of government directives on a local level by way of website, social media and press communications.

Westminster central government declared intent, subject to science, for retailers selling non-essential items to be able to open for business on 15<sup>th</sup> June. It also mentioned 4<sup>th</sup> July as the target date for attractions and other businesses to open.

Visit Weston received comments on 2<sup>nd</sup> June from local businesses and Visit Weston partners that they were receiving cancellations specifically because of the “Don’t Visit” social media campaigns, complaining that we were giving the impression that visitors were not welcome.

Throughout the 3-month period which ran the “Don’t Visit Weston” Facebook banner, we received a large number of abusive comments, such as accusations of denying people’s human rights (to travel to the beach from 100 miles away) and “you don’t deserve to get visitors ever again” amongst many other unpleasant comments. Staff found these difficult to deal with.

Given all of the above and in preparation for the probable July opening of visitor-related businesses such as attractions, only one month ahead, the tourism team agreed that we should consider reverting to our original social media banner by removing the word “Don’t”. The final decision was taken on 3<sup>rd</sup> June in consultation with the Town Clerk and the Mayor (following the Mayor’s interview with Somerset Live on 1<sup>st</sup> June) and we reverted to our original banner “Visit Weston” on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

Visit Weston's main window to the world is our website, that receives approximately 1 million hits per annum. The website continues to deliver a caution about Covid-19 and best practice for visitors to remain safe.

Our social media channels did a good job in supporting the "Don't Visit" message and by 4<sup>th</sup> June it was felt that its work was complete. We continue to post Covid-19 related advisories on the Visit Weston website and the focus is now on Visit Weston - Love Weston – Love Local in support of economic recovery.

### Visit Weston Partnership Working and Initiatives

The majority of the VW partners closed their doors to the public on or around 20<sup>th</sup> March as they are attractions, restaurants, theatre and classified as non-essential by the Government. Visit Weston is in daily contact with them by phone, email and newsletter to update them with vital business information such as how to apply for government grants, how to stay safe if they are accommodating medical staff and any business support that we can offer.

Much of the government advice has been confusing and has severely impacted businesses. Visit Weston has researched all advisories and has regularly updated all Partners with advice on procedures that might benefit their businesses.

There are deep reaching consequences for many accommodation Partners with, for example, cleaning protocols referencing Covid-19, how to serve meals and related sanitisation of cutlery and crockery along with social distancing measures for restaurants and complications with the rulings that only 2 households may meet.

We have updated them individually by email and have also run a Zoom meeting to reinforce our assistance. The Zoom meeting included guest houses, self-catering properties and a camping & caravan site so there was a broad mix of businesses who all face different challenges.

One guest house is using an infrared thermometer and taking the temperature of all arriving guests, refusing to admit them if their temperature is high.

A second Zoom meeting is scheduled for 23<sup>rd</sup> July. All Partners have found this to be beneficial and it has encouraged cross-business assistance between them. For example, camp sites have challenges with operating shower and toilet blocks as the cleaning protocol schedules are too demanding for small businesses and steam carries the virus. Bed & Breakfast establishments are challenged by social distancing in breakfast rooms and having to serve on trays. All accommodation establishments are challenged by the "two-household" rule as this is difficult to police and may invalidate their insurance if it can be shown that the ruling was not adhered to.

You can see a copy of the newsletter sent to all Partners [here](#).



The support that we have given to our partners has been well received all round and we have had positive feedback. It has taken a great deal of research and attention to detail.

Regular phone-arounds are being made to Partners as this is a more personal way in which to reach them, especially at a time when emails have increased in number to all of us. As a result, we have an overview of developments in Weston's tourism sector.

### Communications

We have been in constant contact with NSC's Communications Team with regard to jointly issuing messages to solidify the Government's "Stay at Home" directive during the Coronavirus lockdown. NSC have praised the efforts of Visit Weston and we have agreed that they can use our content when issuing releases on behalf of the North Somerset region.

Additionally, due a restructure within NSC, we have been approached by them for assistance with a 2-month project to inject some entertaining rather than educational social media engagement regarding cancelled events. We have been advised that they are relying on Visit Weston's help as our reach is greater than theirs.

### UKTIC Forum

Visit Weston takes the lead with the Southern UKTIC Forum. This met on 18<sup>th</sup> February in Taunton and was highly productive. Since lockdown, Visit Weston has contacted all members for input on how their regions are affected. There is a mix of input, a few have opened with strict measures in place and where they have the facility to require visitors to follow a one-way system. Others, like ours, are unable to do this and are working remotely.

### Covid-19 Support

Both the Tourism Manager and the Tourism Marketing Officer were deployed to assist Weston Town Council Admin Team with collating and publicising lists of individuals, organisations and businesses who were available to help, particularly with those who are self-isolating. We provided the majority of data and supplemented this with contact details and methodology of obtaining their assistance. We also assisted with the design of posters and social media posts to distribute the information effectively to those in need.

### Place Making

The tourism team met by Zoom with the town clerk along with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Tourism & Leisure Committee to discuss the proposals put forward by NSC's Weston Place Agency. It was advised that the three websites being used for comparative purposes would be better served by looking at other destination marketing websites who have done similar, i.e. Exeter and Plymouth which are more suitably comparable than Paisley, Kings Cross

and Wembley Park and which are supported by Simpleview the same as Visit Weston. It was suggested that if NSC wish to use Weston town council's Visit Weston website, this might introduce a fundamental policy change which would require discussion at full town council, but at the very least, would require a consultation process.

#### Tourism in general

The government's original intention to quarantine all arriving passengers for 2 weeks would have encouraged people to holiday in the UK. However, due to pressure groups from the international airlines and holiday companies, the government was unable to implement the quarantine rules. Flights to and from Spain can be purchased for less than £20 and many countries who have opened their borders for international arrivals are benefiting from discounted holiday prices.

Visit Britain conduct weekly surveys to judge the mood of the travelling public. Their report as of today's date, 15<sup>th</sup> July shows that the proportion confident they would be able to take a U.K. short break or holiday in July (24%) is significantly higher than last week, and there has also been a significant increase in confidence for taking a trip in August, rising from 31% last week to 34% this. Important to note, even given the low prices for overseas holidays, interest or intent to take an overseas holiday has dropped to 41% and 44% confirmed intent to take a short break UK holiday by September 2020 with 36% of that 44% already having made bookings and 18% of the 44% booked to the southwest.

Concerns about catching COVID-19' remains the leading reason for not feeling confident about travelling between July and September this year (49%), followed by 'fewer opportunities to eat/drink out' (46%) and 'fewer things to do/places to visit (44%)'. From October onwards, 'concerns about catching COVID-19' remain the leading reason, 52% stating this. All other reasons are significantly less. Further information can be found here [https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/covid-19\\_consumer\\_tracker\\_uk\\_report\\_week\\_8\\_final\\_for\\_web.pdf](https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/covid-19_consumer_tracker_uk_report_week_8_final_for_web.pdf)

# Report to the Tourism and Leisure Committee – April 2020

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

Report written by Emma Williams, Tourism Marketing Officer

### Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Website Statistics

The Visit Weston-super-Mare website visitor numbers and page views are reported below for both the reporting period:

Period	Visitors	Page Views	New Visitors	Top 10 Visitor IP address locations
1 <sup>st</sup> Feb- 31 <sup>st</sup> Mar	37,333	87,400	85.7%	1. Bristol 2. London 3. (Not Set) 4. Weston-super-Mare 5. Birmingham 6. Cardiff 7. Southampton 8. Bridgwater 9. Taunton 10. Clevedon
(2019)	(47,116)	(106,274)	(85.4%)	

### **Top Ten Visited Website Pages 1<sup>st</sup> Feb-31<sup>st</sup> Mar**

- |                                |                                 |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Home page                   | 6. Shopping                     |
| 2. Things to Do                | 7. Accommodation                |
| 3. Attractions                 | 8. Car Parking                  |
| 4. What's On                   | 9. Caravan & Holiday Parks      |
| 5. Monthly Highlights Calendar | 10. Events in Weston-super-Mare |

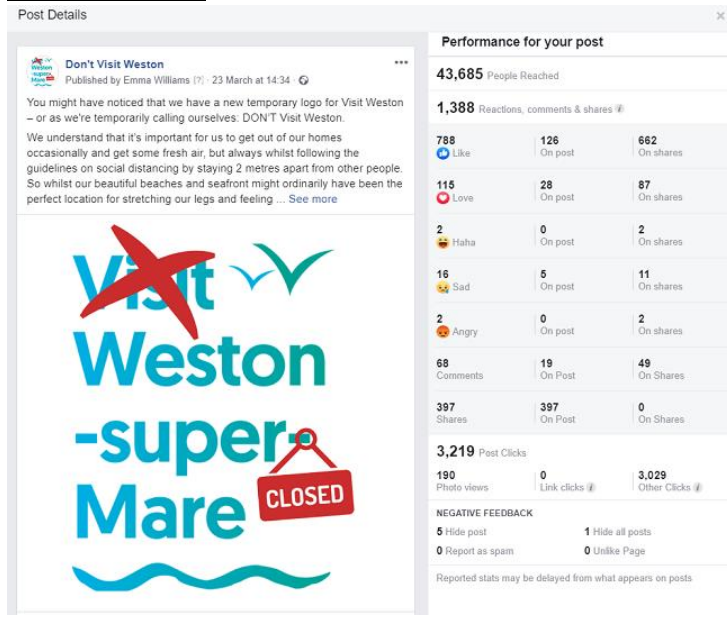
### Website News and Updates

Unsurprisingly the website has felt the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and in March Visit Weston saw a 40% drop in site visitors compared to March 2019. Following consultation with Simpleview, I can report that this sort of reduction has been seen by all Destination Marketing Organisations, some as badly affected as an 80% drop year-on-year.

New content has been added to the website to reflect the current situation. This includes pages listing accommodation providers that are able to house key workers and food, drink and shopping businesses still trading and the changes to their services, in addition to statements and press releases in relation to the government guidelines on social distancing and therefore actively discouraging visitors to the town.

With both the Tourism Manager and Tourism Marketing Officer working from home at this time, we have elected to use this time valuably by applying concentrated focus to the website; updating and refreshing content in line with our SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) recommendations, as well as 'WCAG' (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) legislation due to come into force in September. We are currently negotiating with Simpleview regarding the most cost-effective way of rolling out new functionality to the Visit Weston website, that will fully encompass all accessibility guidelines for website users. These will likely include: text-to-speech readers, display alteration options and simplified viewing modes.

## Social Media



During this time, the most effective way to engage with our customer-base and audience quickly and with little or no cost, is to utilise our social media accounts to their fullest potential. Many more people are housebound with time to spare, so social media usage has climbed during the last six weeks. These factors, along with new, appealing and successful content have meant that our reach and engagement levels across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have all risen sharply. Our Facebook reach for the period 14 March – 14 April showed a ten-fold increase on the previous month. In March alone, we secured 191 new Facebook page likes, bringing the total number by 31<sup>st</sup> to 4,128. The post documenting the launch of the temporary 'Don't' Visit Weston' rebranding has reached 43,685 at the time of writing this report.. This was also well received on Twitter and Instagram.

We have taken this message into the heart of much of our latest social media content including parodies of vintage rail posters with a new 'anti-tourism' angle – those receiving over 10,000 views, an update on the classic Lord Kitchener 'Your Country Needs You' poster and a series of 'Wendy Says' posts, featuring a traditional beach donkey delivering quirky messages to stay at home and to follow social distancing rules.

## Destination Marketing Campaigns

With Visit Weston's approach turning on its head during this time, notably our temporary rebranding to 'Don't Visit Weston', we see little point in rolling out our 2020/21 advertising campaigns. We have contacted all relevant suppliers and stakeholders with whom we had planned to work on our destination marketing for the year, and postponed all campaigns until further notice.



The

year-long campaign with Pear Communications is ready to launch as soon as we are able to begin promoting the resort again, with all digital and printed content completed and with Pear, ready to distribute and set live in motorway service areas when we request it. The printed postcard that will encourage people to visit the website - and then in turn visit Weston-super-Mare, was finalised with the following design, with special consideration given to include our 'sister services', Weston Museum and The Blakehay.

30,000 of these postcards are currently in storage with Pear Communications and will feature in the agreed twelve selected motorway service areas nationwide, along with an animated digital screen advertisement with a complimentary design.

### Additional Responsibilities

To contribute towards the cross-departmental effort by the Town Council, the Tourism Marketing Officer has also been temporarily re-deployed to assist with communications and marketing for the Covid-19 Response team, in addition to working on usual tourism marketing tasks.

In order to ensure consistent communication and information flow, as well as keep up morale, the tourism team engage in three face-to-face ZOOM meetings per week, reporting into the Assistant Town Clerk.



# Report to the Tourism and Leisure Committee – June 2020

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

Report written by Emma Williams, Tourism Marketing Officer

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 <sup>st</sup> Apr- 31 <sup>st</sup> May	28,656	51,279	88.4%	1. Bristol 2. London 3. (not set) 4. Birmingham 5. Weston-super-Mare 6. Coventry 7. Taunton 8. Bridgwater 9. Cardiff 10. Cheltenham
(2019)	(78,261)	(180,196)	(84.5%)	

### Top Ten Visited Website Pages 1<sup>st</sup> Apr-31<sup>st</sup> May

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Home page                          | 6. Car Parking                          |
| 2. Weston Beach                       | 7. Attractions                          |
| 3. Sand Bay                           | 8. What's On                            |
| 4. (Love Weston) Covid-19 update blog | 9. Beach and Seafront                   |
| 5. Things to Do                       | 10. (Visit Weston) Covid-19 update blog |

### Website News and Updates

April saw an enormous decline in traffic to the Visit Weston-super-Mare website, returning an 80% decrease to visitor numbers versus April 2019. Traffic has since recovered somewhat throughout May, coinciding with the lessening of social distancing guidelines as announced by Westminster. This has shortened the percentage drop in year-on-year comparisons with May 2020 seeing a 50% decrease in traffic against May 2019.

The Committee will note two separate entries in the 'Top 10 Viewed Pages' table for the perpetual Covid-19 blog, where latest updates and news stories are added in real time. Whilst the content of the page is the same, the URL address of this page has been listed differently depending on the target audience. When communicating with locals and residents, the article's address has been given as a [loveweston.com](https://loveweston.com) page, whilst for wider audiences and those reaching the website through Google, it is tracked as a [visitweston.com](https://visitweston.com) page. This data shows more residents have accessed this content than other web users. This provides us with valuable information to consider when communicating further updates through this page.

In May the website launched its 'Audio Eye Pro' add-on which seeks to provide an optional interface to website users that require increased accessibility assistance. Simpleview began the process of costing this product by considering the needs of two of their larger clients, Visit Brighton and Visit Manchester. It was useful for Simpleview to consider the needs of smaller DMOs, like Visit Weston, and so we were able to negotiate receiving the product free of charge for twelve months as a live test case for their support team. Owing to our excellent and long-established relationship with Simpleview, this has been agreed in principle with the suggestion that Visit Weston purchases

alternative upgrades from Simpleview with the budget lines now freed up from WCAG-related commitments. From a digital marketing perspective, it would be excellent timing to upgrade the whole site with Simpleview's new, more modern site design (as adopted by several of their other clients) which includes edge-to-edge high resolution photographs and smarter menu overlays, in time to begin re-advertising Weston-super-Mare once all legislation allows.

'WCAG' (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) legislation is due to come into force during September 2020, and so it is hoped that with Audio Eye's functionality, the website meets all requirements for accessibility. The interface added to the site is aimed at those with visual impairments and/or learning difficulties, and includes:

- A larger cursor arrow
- A scrolling underlined text guideline tracker
- A scrolling high-contrast text guideline tracker
- Key text can be emphasised e.g. Menu headers and Headlines
- 5 options for differing display contrasts
- 4 options for differing text sizes
- 4 options for differing font styles
- Text descriptions for all images can be displayed
- Animations can be disabled from the page

The functionality can be easily enabled or disabled as the web user sees necessary, and are accessed through the universal 'blue man' accessibility logo at the bottom right of each web page. Opting to address WCAG compliance with an add-on piece of software is far more cost-effective than rebuilding the whole website to display only in a WCAG-compliant way, which would also diminish the aesthetic of the website, which is designed to be visually appealing to the visitor economy.

In May a new 'Love Weston' section of the website was launched, aimed at reaching Weston residents and eventually becoming an expansive and useful resource for locals, rather than visitors. It has always been our mission to support local businesses and to welcome our residents as visitors. Whilst lockdown continues, it was decided to resurrect our Love Weston identity alongside our Visit Weston theme, enhancing this with an added tagline Love Local. We engaged with residents over social media to enquire what sort of information they'd like including on these pages, and are currently working through ways to publish these to the site. The decision to relaunch the Love Weston identity for this purpose, made more sense than attempting to create a new branding or ethos for these pages, when Love Weston is already so well-known and embraced by residents.

#### Social Media News and Updates

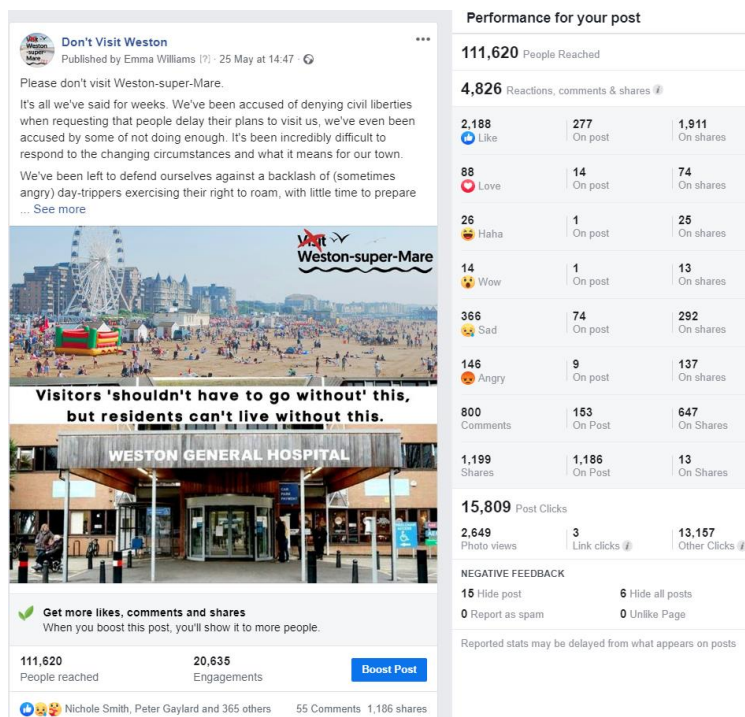
The department has again focused on promoting a message to discourage visitors to Weston-super-Mare, as well as the launch of a local engagement strategy, focusing on 'Love Local, Love Weston'. We have shared more posts created by local businesses, assisting their own advertising work by broadcasting their messages to our (usually) larger audience.

The largest two (Don't) Visit Weston social media accounts' data for the reporting period, is shown as tabulated below:

Data Type	Facebook 1 <sup>st</sup> Apr – 31 <sup>st</sup> May	Twitter 1 <sup>st</sup> Apr – 31 <sup>st</sup> May	Totals 1 <sup>st</sup> Apr – 31 <sup>st</sup> May
Reach/Impressions	267,222	42,400	309,622
New Followers/Likes	286	58	344
Profile Page Views	5392	2387	7,779
Current Followers (as of 01/06/2020)	4524	4955	9,479

The 'Reach/Impressions' column refers to the number of times our content has been seen by unique social media accounts.

The root of these impressive figures is Facebook, which clearly accounts for the majority of our social media engagement; Twitter is widely regarded as a far less effective platform for DMOs, which accounts for the disparity in the data between the two sites. However, our engagement rate on Twitter has tripled during the reporting period.



Our most successful social media post was published on Facebook on Bank Holiday Monday - 25<sup>th</sup> May, commenting on the temporary closure of Weston General Hospital. At the time of writing this report (1<sup>st</sup> June 2020), the total number of impressions for this single post is 111,620, largely because of the 1,186 user 'shares'.

As a department, it has been agreed that we will now look to lessen the number of posts published by Visit Weston that focus on negative stories and the 'Don't Visit' message. Since early May, we have referred all press and media requests to the communications team at North Somerset Council, and so in tandem with this decision, we are allowing their social media accounts to dictate the tone and volume of any posts we create that discourage visitors. This will likely have a future impact on our social media numbers, as the current social climate seems to suggest that social media engagement increases when the content is opinion-based or focuses on emotive issues, as all COVID-19 communications are. It is hoped the strength of our 'Love Local' message will compensate for any drop in these numbers.

## Destination Marketing Campaigns

All 2020/21 destination marketing is still postponed, with no campaign launches imminent. We remain in close contact with our key advertising stakeholders - Pear Communications, Global Media and Clear Channel, with the Tourism Marketing Officer attending a 'Public Sector Advertising' webinar hosted by Clear Channel in May.

## Additional Work Undertaken

The Tourism Marketing Officer has continued to provide support to the Town Council's COVID-19 Community Response team; producing communications and digital graphics to help promote the council's efforts with North Somerset Together and the volunteer groups. This also includes establishing a launch strategy and Facebook page for Councillor Bute's 'Bags for Lives' programme in April; coordinating the manufacture of laundry bags for local frontline workers' uniforms and PPE.

# Report to the Tourism and Leisure Committee – July 2020

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

Report written by Emma Williams, Tourism Marketing Officer

### 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 <sup>st</sup> -30 <sup>th</sup> June	27,986	60,494	85%	1. Bristol 2. London 3. (not set) 4. Birmingham 5. Weston-super-Mare 6. Coventry 7. Redditch 8. Cheltenham 9. Taunton 10. Cardiff
(2019)	(45,702)	(97,092)	(83.5%)	

### Top Ten Visited Website Pages 1<sup>st</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> June

- |                       |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Home Page          | 6. Car Parking           |
| 2. Covid-19 Info Blog | 7. Attractions           |
| 3. Weston Beach       | 8. Caravan/Holiday Parks |
| 4. Sand Bay Beach     | 9. Dog Friendly Weston   |
| 5. Things to Do       | 10. Sovereign Centre     |

### Website News and Updates

As the population begins to travel for days out and holidays, the Visit Weston website continues to recover from the substantial drop in visitors since March; with month-on-month growth shown again in June. However, these numbers are still a fraction of those we'd ordinarily see at this time of year, especially considering the uplift in site visitors we have ahead of the annual Air Weekend that would usually take place in June.

The site continues to receive regular Covid-19 and Weston information updates, that are accessible with one click or tap, straight from the homepage. Members will note, this is the second-most visited page throughout this period.

Following an offer made to local businesses that are not currently Visit Weston partners, we have two new banner advertisements placed on the site in June. These were offered free of charge for three months, with the option to continue after this period, with fees in line with our usual pricing structure. The Tourism Marketing Officer is now able to produce animated banner ads as well as static ads, which we may be able to offer at a premium in the future.

Work continues on the new 'Love Weston' section (as reported in the TMO's previous Committee report); ideas are being drafted for new content, following public consultation via Facebook.

## Social Media News and Update

Following the decision in early June to 'drop the Don't' from the Visit Weston name, we saw an increase in negative engagement through social media from locals and residents disagreeing with our judgement. Many felt it was 'too soon' to encourage potential visitors and as a result we lost 34 followers on Facebook in one day. Thankfully, this decrease was soon equalised through engagement with new content later in the month.

Our social media analytical data for the reporting period is shown below:

Data Type	Facebook 1 <sup>st</sup> – 30 <sup>th</sup> June	Twitter 1 <sup>st</sup> – 30 <sup>th</sup> June	Totals 1 <sup>st</sup> – 30 <sup>th</sup> June
Reach/Impressions	187,581	15,600	203,181
Current Followers (as of 15/07/2020)	4,717	4,988	9,705

The 'Reach/Impressions' column refers to the number of times our content has been seen by unique social media accounts.

The root of these impressive figures is Facebook, which clearly accounts for the majority of our social media engagement; Twitter is widely regarded as a far less effective platform for DMOs, which accounts for the disparity in the data between the two sites. However, our engagement rate on Twitter has increased significantly (between 250-300%) since March.

**Visit Weston-super-Mare**  
Published by Emma Williams · 1 June ·

Visitors to Weston-super-Mare,  
This sort of behaviour is never acceptable. Not now, not ever.  
If you do choose to visit Weston's beaches and open spaces, please leave our environment just as you found it.  
If bins are full, please take your rubbish home and dispose of it responsibly and safely.  
We can say with some certainty that residents don't disrespect our beaches in this way, please follow their example and show some love for Weston, the way we do.  
#leaveonlyfootprints

**WHAT HAPPENED TO 'ONLY LEAVE FOOTPRINTS BEHIND?'**

**UNACCEPTABLE**

**IF YOU DO CHOOSE TO VISIT OUR BEACHES, PLEASE RESPECT OUR TOWN AND DISPOSE OF YOUR RUBBISH RESPONSIBLY.**

Get more likes, comments and shares  
When you boost this post, you'll show it to more people.

105,249 People reached  
12,505 Engagements

Boost Post

Performance for your post

105,249 People Reached

5,969 Reactions, comments & shares

1,356 Like	97 On post	1,259 On shares
24 Love	2 On post	22 On shares
4 Haha	0 On post	4 On shares
48 Wow	3 On post	45 On shares
477 Sad	67 On post	410 On shares
1,998 Angry	166 On post	1,832 On shares
945 Comments	115 On Post	830 On Shares
1,120 Shares	1,115 On Post	5 On Shares

6,536 Post Clicks

1,373 Photo views	0 Link clicks	5,163 Other Clicks
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NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

19 Hide post	8 Hide all posts
0 Report as spam	0 Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

Our most successful social media post for the period was published on Facebook following a sharp increase in visitors to the town, with a disappointing amount of litter left on the beach and seafront. The post reached 105,249 people on Facebook and 3,439 on Twitter – again demonstrating the huge difference between passive and active engagement from our followers on the two platforms.

As more and more businesses are being permitted to reopen, Visit Weston has focussed on assisting our partners and other local businesses with relaunching their marketing and advertising campaigns.



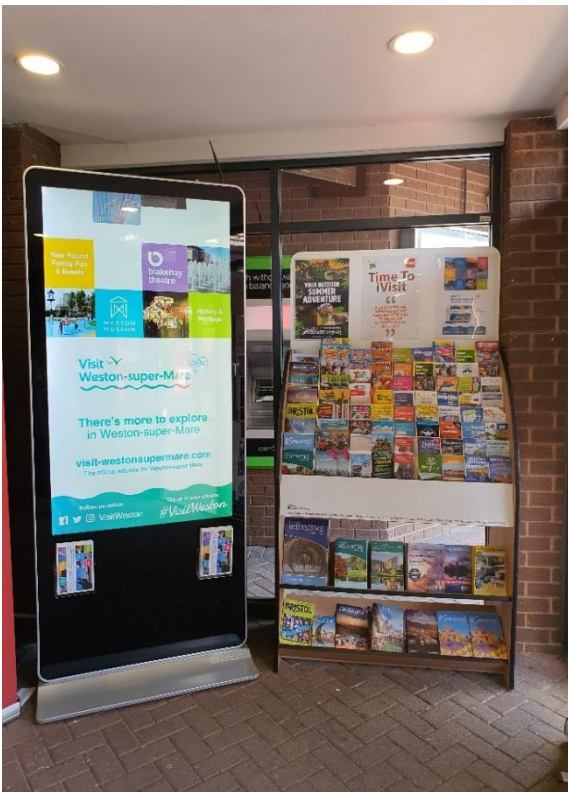
## **Destination Marketing Campaigns**

Work with Pear Communications has commenced, with the launch of a July – October campaign, designed to support the town's Covid-19 recovery efforts. The previously agreed campaign comprises animated digital and attractive printed destination marketing content, placed in twelve motorway service areas along the western spine of the England, into South Wales and across to London.

Pear Communications have also offered Visit Weston A3 poster frames throughout these twelve services at no extra cost. This means the message to 'Visit Weston' is visible and thus further reinforced, as the public move through and dwell in other areas of the services.

Pear report that during this three-month period, the campaign should be seen by around 12million people. This is a reliable estimate, considering that surveys have shown a lack of confidence in overseas travel, with consumers electing to holiday in the UK this year; twinned with low fuel prices, predictions show that motorways and their associated service areas will be busy during July, August, September and October.

An example of our campaign in situ, is shown here:



The image shows a 50" screen plinth fitted with bespoke postcard holders for our printed materials. Presenting our materials separately to Pear's other clients in this way, makes our campaign stand out against the competition.

No other destination marketing campaigns are being considered at this time.

## **Additional Work Undertaken**

The Tourism Marketing Officer has visited the VIC building regularly to update the content displayed on the outward-facing TV screen. New slides containing the reopening information of our Platinum Plus partners were designed and uploaded to the TV. Additional printed signage has also been produced by the TMO and hung in the VIC windows, advising of our contact details for enquiries whilst the centre is closed.

A newsletter was created and distributed to all Visit Weston partners, containing updates received during the TMO and TM's participation in Visit Somerset webinars. Two of these webinars took place in June, with advice and information on tourism industry reopenings throughout the county.

# **Tourism & Leisure Committee Grounds Update Report – Monday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2020**

Fay Powell – Grounds Manager

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## **Play Areas & Open Spaces**

On the 24/03/2020 the Government announced the closure of all playgrounds across the country during the Lockdown. With this the Grounds Team closed and secured all Weston-super-Mare Town Council play areas and skate parks. They attached signage to the gates of these sites and our Communications Officer published information to the public.

During the Lockdown the Operational Grounds Team were called to site numerous times to re-secure the sites after being informed by the Police and the public that people had broken in.

Throughout this time the team have worked with the local Police Beat Team and North Somerset Council's Community Response to deter youths from gathering in the play areas and in turn reduce vandalism and graffiti, as well as ensure their safety during the pandemic.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020 play areas were permitted to re-open.

Government Guidance was produced shortly before which was challenging to meet and working with North Somerset Council and other Town and Parish Councils it was deemed not practical to reopen.

Further discussions took place with our Health and Safety Advisor, Insurers, SMT and the Grounds Team. A decision was made along with other Councils after a time of reflection that play areas could re-open with a refreshed, practical approach to the Government Guidance.

The Grounds Team prior to opening carried out full operational inspections and maintenance to open with ease at short notice.

Between the time of these inspections and the re-opening on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2020 some play areas were vandalised and some unable to open until repairs were made. The worst affected were:

- Jubilee Park
- Hutton Moor Skate Park
- Waterpark
- Uphill Junior

At the time of writing this report Monday 20<sup>th</sup> July the Waterpark still remains closed as we need our contractor to make repairs as they are too great for the Grounds Team to carry out.

We have now opened all of our sites (apart from the Waterpark), they have been maintained, grass cut and numerous signs have been placed to re-iterate the importance of Covid-19 guidance.

Calculations have been made for each site to stipulate a maximum number of people to be at each location at any one time, this has also been recorded on the signage and will be put on our website as a point of reference. Each site also has a unique Covid-19 risk assessment.

### **Future Works**

The Grounds Team are working together on the Play Area Refurbishment Programme as due to damage caused sites need to be reassessed. This will be shared as soon as it is finished.

### **Members are requested to:**

- Note the report