

REPORT TO TOURISM AND LEISURE COMMITTEE – 3rd February 2020

Tourism Function Update – 2020/2021

Following debate at the Policy and Finance meeting on 16th December 2019, the Town Council at its meeting on 20th January 2020 have approved an overall net cost budget of £137,307 to operate the tourism function in the coming year.

This represents a reduction on both the current year and to the growth aspirations put forward by officers to Tourism and Leisure Committee on 2nd December 2019.

As a result, emergency meetings were held prior to and after the Christmas/New Year break with relevant management staff and the Chair of T&L Cttee in order find a compromised best way forward model.

Our main considerations encompassed achieving the designated budget reduction whilst still trying to best fulfil our service expectations i.e. to maintain customer obligations towards our Visit Weston Members around destination advertising campaigns and achieving the best possible customer service experience at the Visitor Information Centre itself.

Whilst officers prepared revised budget options as directed, it should be noted that all of three of the options presented to Full Council necessitate curtailment of opening hours, reductions to staffing and merchandising ability and the extent of destination and in-resort marketing we can undertake. The combination of these significant factors will in short have a direct knock on impact on our ability to manage both customer and staffing expectations in the year ahead.

As a result, the VIC facility will open for Easter as planned, but will operate on much reduced staffing levels and shorter opening times and hours particularly in the shoulder periods.

The direct impact on seasonal staff will be shorter fixed term contracts than in 2019 and potential phasing in of some staff to cover the busier holiday periods between May and August.

At this point I should advise of the known challenges that members should be appraised of at the outset.

The shorter season and reduced seasonal contracts could lead to recruitment issues if the 2019 staff don't wish to apply in 2020.

- There will be reduced opportunity to achieve the higher income figure of £16,500 at the VIC due to the shorter season and opening times.
- Visit Weston Partners rely on both our marketing advertising campaigns and verbal recommendations and referrals from the VIC which are key selling points for existing and potential partners who could view the reduced commitment levels as a reason to not auto renew, therefore a fall-off in partnership fees and ultimately income achievement would result.

- There could be a challenge from North Somerset as to the viability of the Town Council's SLA, whereby we agree to certain level of staff commitment in the summer season.

The tourism function has been recognised since its inception in 2012 for numerous prestigious industry awards including for our Destination Website, Visitor Information Service, Outstanding Contribution to Tourism and Tourism Innovation. These are independently judged by accredited bodies including South West Tourism and Weston Chamber of Commerce and serve to add kudos to both the Visit Weston brand. They also recognise the Town Council's efforts to support the economic development and vitality of our town.

Further more detailed information is contained within the reports of the Tourism Manager and Tourism Marketing Officer.

Tania Middlemiss

Assistant Town Clerk

25th January 2020

Cemetery

We have successfully appointed our Amenities Officer. We are pleased to welcome Tricia Mackrell to the Grounds Team.

Our Operational Grounds Team in the Cemetery have completed their Topple Testing, inspecting approximately 10,000 memorials, identifying 100 in need of attention.

- 25 have been 'steaked and banded'
- 50 minor repairs
- The remaining have been issued with a notice for the plot owner to take action within 6 months, this is monitored by the Grounds Team.

Over the month of January numerous burials, deed transfers and services in the Chapel have taken place. The purchasing of Memorial Garden plots is still a popular choice as well as ex- common graves.

We are reviewing the carbon footprint of the Cemetery and ways to reduce this as we move forward.

We are working on a tree purchasing scheme for Memorial, Birth and Celebration trees across our open spaces.

Our Tree Specialist Steve Clark has devised a Tree Walk around our Cemetery which we will be launching in the near future.

Training

Some members of the Grounds Team will be attending a Cemetery Legal Compliance Course on Thursday 6th February 2020 as well as a Memorial Management Course On Friday 27th March 2020.

Waterpark

A de-brief took place on Thursday 5th December 2019. Members of North Somerset Council Seafront Team and the Grounds Department discussed the past season, ways to improve and practical works that needed to take place before the season starts in 2020.

The recommissioning of the Splash Pad is underway and we are working closely with the surfacing contractor to ensure everything is in place and operational for the

start of the Easter Holidays. We will be working with our Communications Officer to ensure both staff and members of the public are aware of the works.

On Sunday 19th January 2020 we experienced a burst sewer pipe in the Crazy Golf site next to the Water Park, this impacted on us which Wessex Water swiftly dealt with and cleaned the area affected.

Play Areas & Open Spaces

At the time of writing this report works are due to be completed at our Conniston Green play area. A verbal update will be given at the meeting.

We continue to inspect and monitor all of our sites, responding to any issues when they arise whilst also looking towards future refurbishment projects.

Members are requested to:

- Note the report

Fay Powell - Grounds Manager

Report to the Tourism and Leisure Committee – February 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 as well as 2019 as a whole:

Period	Visitors	Page Views	New Visitors	Top 10 Visitor IP address locations
1 st November – 31 st December 2019	60,597	103,257	81.9%	Bristol London (not set) WsM Bridgwater Taunton Cardiff Birmingham Southampton Exeter
(2018)	(59,650)	(134,720)	(81.2%)	
1 st January – 31 st December 2019	429,665	923,325	82.5%	London Bristol (not set) WsM Birmingham Chicago Bridgwater Southampton Cardiff Taunton
(2018)	(446,149)	(949,908)	(84.6%)	

November and December 2019 saw more traffic than 2018, which is encouraging. Given that such a high proportion of the site visitors came from Bristol, this might indicate the success of our high profile outdoor advertising campaign in Bristol city centre and Temple Meads station during December.

The average 3.5% decrease in year-on-year visitors and page views, may be attributable to a number of factors; firstly, the 'Visit Weston' website online launched mid-way through 2018, thus the first half of 2018's figures are taken from traffic visiting the 'Love Weston' site which was far longer established as a website with a larger returning audience.

Secondly, in stark contrast to 2019, 2018 is widely regarded as a 'bumper' year for UK tourism, as the weather was reliably excellent for long spells during the spring and summer. This meant there were significantly more enquiries and visits to UK destination marketing websites as a result.

2019 saw many alterations in search engine programming from Google, that have detrimentally impacted on millions of websites, including ours. Google launched their 'Walled Garden' that mines data from other websites and presents it as its own, precluding the need for web users to visit any particular website for the information they require. We have worked hard to combat this through application of focus on SEO specifically, however it is an ongoing issue.

Top Ten Pages 01/11/19 - 31/12/19	Top Ten Pages 01/01/19 – 31/12/19
1. Carnival	1. Home
2. Home	2. Things To Do
3. Fireworks at Sea	3. What's On
4. Icescape	4. Carnival
5. Things to Do	5. Monthly Highlights Calendar
6. What's On	6. Air Festival
7. Monthly Highlights Calendar	7. Beach
8. Cinderella Panto	8. Attractions
9. Shopping	9. Shopping
10. Attractions	10. Accommodation

We have uploaded a presentation file to the website which details our marketing campaigns in 2019, demonstrating our creativity and acumen in exploring new territories and demographics; it has also been forwarded to all councillors by the Assistant Town Clerk. This is also done to assist in encouraging new Visit Weston partnerships and secure retentions.

On Friday 7th February our workplace industry placement student from Weston College begins working with us. He will be briefed to compile a portfolio of images and videos of Weston-super-Mare for promotional use. His drone footage video that we have shared online and will (at time of writing this report) be uploaded to the Visit Weston website, following a request from the Communications Officer, it is likely to also be used on the new Weston Town Council website. The Tourism Marketing Officer met with a representative from Weston College to officially outline the requirements for his placement and the potential of taking other students under the same terms.

Following recommendations from our Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) advisor, we have begun creation of several new sections on the Visit Weston website. In order to receive increased traffic to the website, we can look to provide content that answers search engine enquiries for information we currently do not have on our site, for example: weddings in Weston-super-Mare, boat trips from Weston-super-Mare etc. We are meeting with our Simpleview account manager later in February to discuss additional new ways to uplift our site visitor numbers.

Social Media

Reporting period:

During the reporting period of November and December 2019, Visit Weston received a total of 85,823 impressions across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. This was largely due to sharing posts relating to our successes at the BBS Tourism Awards, a Facebook photography competition and an original poem parodying 'The Night Before Christmas', shared on Christmas Eve.

Whilst no one post alone has stood out during November and December, data shows that more of our posts are consistently performing well with our Facebook average post reach now 2,500 users, versus around 600 users at the start of the summer season. I believe that a greater understanding of our audience i.e. what they'd like to read, a preference for image content and an emphasis on users sharing our content, has brought up our engagement rate and readership as a result. Overall, I am very pleased with our current standing across social media.

Throughout 2019:

Visit Weston's social media presence experienced an excellent 2019 with some encouraging statistics on its follower numbers and overall marketing efficacy. Our Facebook content reached almost 800,000 accounts - a 20% increase on 2018, with page views reaching just over 10,000 - a 45% increase on 2018. We gained an average of 95 new followers each month throughout 2019, ending the year with a Facebook readership of 3910 users.

Twitter too has seen increases to our readership, with a 200% increase for impressions throughout 2019, and 4802 followers on the site.

Instagram saw the most significant improvements with over double the number of followers by the end of 2019 than the start, finishing the year with 1080 followers. Instagram is widely considered to be the most popular of the three social networks, especially with under 30s. Instagram is a great tool for engaging with our ‘fans’ in an image-led platform, which gives us the opportunity to sell Weston on the strength of its landscape, vistas, sunsets etc.

Across these main three social networks we closed 2019 with 9,790 followers and a combined number of impressions for the year of over 1.1 million, which for ‘free’ advertising is an excellent return.

Destination Marketing Campaigns

Following the announcement of the destination marketing budget for 2020/21, work has begun on the campaigns we plan to run during the next year.

Central to our advertising strategy is the year-long campaign we have devised with Pear Communications – the details of which were outlined in the last committee report. In January, Pear were invited to meet with myself and the Assistant Town Clerk to present our ideas to the Committee Chairman and Vice Chairman which were positively received.

At the time of writing this report, Pear have been informed of our commitment to the campaign and currently we are arranging the design, printing and delivery of our ‘postcard’ print materials for placement in the Pear leaflet racking in our twelve selected motorway service areas, these are:

MSA Locations	
Charnock Richard - M6 (S), near Preston	Keele – M6, between Wolverhampton & Warrington
Norton Canes – M6, south of Cannock	Hartshead Moor – M62, near Huddersfield
Sandbach – M6, east of Crewe	Warwick – M40 between Worcester & Northampton
Sarn – M4, Bridgend	Telford – M54
Oxford – M40	Michaelwood – M5, between Gloucester & Bristol
London Gateway – M1, Edgware	Hopwood Park – M42, Bromsgrove

All these services are branded as Road Chef or Welcome Break and most are open 24hrs a day with onsite accommodation. All contain either a combination of M&S Food, McDonalds and Costa or, Waitrose, KFC and Starbucks franchises. This forms the core of our campaign, along with several Morrisons supermarkets, Sainsburys, John Lewis and railway station placements.

In relation to our wider strategy as proposed within our original growth aspirations, the scope of Visit Weston’s destination marketing will be significantly reduced as a result of department’s decreed budget for 2020/21. The cost of advertising the Visit Weston brand on the scale we had originally hoped for, now lays beyond our reach and so it is predicted that the growth targets for website visitors (along with other departmental KPIs) will be considerably more difficult to achieve.

The TMO and TM will be attending a training session in Exeter this month, organised as part of the West Country Tourism Conference, covering ‘Marketing, Digital and PR’. It is hoped that this will provide some new ideas and insight into ways we can promote Visit Weston and the resort.

Report from Caroline Darlington, Tourism Manager, to the Tourism & Leisure Committee 3rd February 2020

VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE

Awards

In the four seasons that the VIC has operated, it has been awarded no fewer than 7 prestigious awards, with an 8th and potentially 9th to be announced in February 2020.

Award	Year	Result	Awarding Body
Tourist Information Service of the Year	2018	Silver	Bristol, Bath & Somerset Tourism Awards
Services to Tourism	2018	Winner	Weston Business Awards
Outstanding Contribution to Tourism	2019	Winner	Weston Business Awards
LGBTQ Champion in the Workplace Award	2019	Winner	WsM Pride/LGBT+ Forum
Plastic Free Initiatives	2018/9	Approved status	Surfers against Sewage
Plastic Free	2018/9	Champion	Plasticfree.org.uk
Tourist Information Service of the Year	2019	Gold winner	Bristol, Bath & Somerset Tourism Awards

Tourist Information Service of the Year (2019/20) Southwest Tourism Awards encompassing The Isles of Scilly, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire and South Gloucestershire). Weston VIC has either Bronze, Silver or Gold, to be announced on 6th February 2020

Services to Tourism 2020 (Weston Chamber of Commerce) Nominated, announcement 07.02.20

Awards are judged by independent travel industry experts and are subject to mystery shoppers, mystery telephone calls and mystery emails. The following testimonial has been received from one of the mystery shoppers from the Bristol, Bath & Somerset Tourism Awards:

“WSM VIC is doing a great job. Council funded and well-staffed. It was a spacious and well laid out VIC with suitable items for sale for beach goers and those like me looking to see what I could do on a rainy day. The staff member was bubbling with information

and held my eye contact engaging exceptionally well. I left armed with leaflets and felt very comfortable wandering around looking at the range of retail and information provided. Doing a great job at a very busy and important destination in the SW.”

Visit Weston Partnerships

Visit Weston has the following partners at present.

Membership	Membership	Membership	Membership	Membership
Bronze £150	Silver £250	Gold £350	Platinum £500	Platinum Plus £700
27	15	13	18	8

Business Type	Business Type	Business Type	Business Type
Accommodation	Attraction	Restaurant	Shopping
38	23	11	10

In the winter months when the VIC is closed to the public, the permanent tourism staff are consolidating customer relations and developing sales to new partnerships. We have a number of confirmed appointments and hope to report new signings imminently. There is also a number of auto-renewals which we are following-up for re-signing. Unfortunately, The Royal Hotel has declined to renew and we are following-up to attempt to persuade them to reverse that decision.

We feel it is important for the committee to understand that with reduced staff and reduced opening hours in the VIC, it will be a tough challenge to achieve and increase in partnerships over the coming financial year. Word of mouth referrals from a 26-week VIC operation are valued by all Visit Weston partners. For accommodation providers, these can often be last minute bookings from visitors to the VIC who have decided on the spur of the moment to overnight here. For restaurants, shops and attractions and for the museum and Blakehay, it goes without saying that referrals are high on the list and valued key selling points, which will be hard to satisfy with shortened opening hours.

Wider Tourism Matters

Visit Somerset

The Tourism Manager (TM) and the Tourism Marketing Officer (TMO) are attending Visit Somerset’s next Coastal Summit meeting on 14th February in Minehead to progress a branding and brochure for the Somerset coastal towns from Minehead to Portishead.

OYO Hotels

As reported at last meeting, OYO Hotels have commenced talking to a number of accommodation providers in Weston-super-Mare. To remind you, is now the second largest hotel group in the world. In essence they are a revenue management company, they offer hotel owners the opportunity to remain independent and to manage the day-to-day running of their property, but manage their income and revenue remotely. They also work with a huge network of investors who might purchase or lease properties. They have confirmed that they have signed up a hotel in Weston-super-Mare and the OYO brand will appear in late February, though they will not state which hotel this is.

North Somerset Council

Visit Weston has always embraced and enjoyed an excellent working relationship with NSC on tourism matters, including working alongside their seafront team in the Tropicana and the VIC. We have developed this further with meetings with their new Tourism Officer who is grateful for support as she has no staff or budget. We have introduced her to some contacts and ideas for developing a film unit so that production companies can be encouraged to increase their use of Weston-super-Mare and surrounds for TV and film production.

The TM has been invited to a meeting with the new general manager of NSC's Seafront Team to mutually evaluate rota requirements for the Summer. He has also requested an evaluation of the town council's SLA with NSC for the VIC, which states that the town council will man the VIC with at least one staff member for the summer season.

UKTIC

We have confirmed 18th February for our next Tourist Information Centre forum in Taunton at the VIC there. On the agenda are how to increase business from coach companies, journalist and travel agent familiarisation trips and the Visit Somerset coastal summit. This forum was established by the Tourism Manager and is attended by VIC's from across the southwest.

Aspirations for 2020

It was reported to the last committee meeting in December that we were hopeful to increase both shop sales and partnership sales and that we hoped also to re-recruit the 2019 team, that was highly engaged and enthusiastic. Their experience would be a tremendous asset for 2020 and would prevent the necessity to train new staff into the ethos, allowing the VIC to hit the ground running right from the beginning of the season. Since last report the tourism budget, specifically the VIC budget, was cut. The TM along

with senior officers have had to re-adjust staffing plans and opening hours for the VIC according to affordability with a reduced budget.

Although the budget was cut, the targets were not and VIC shop sale target has been increased from £14,000 to £16,500 with fewer opening hours and potentially with a new staff cohort, it must be put on record that we are fearful that the target will be difficult to meet. Every effort will be made to merchandise the shop to achieve the target.

We aim to open the VIC from April to September, taking into consideration the school holidays. Officers have had to re-evaluate opening hours and staffing levels in the VIC to comply with a reduction in staffing budget from £27,198 in 2019 to £24,378 in 2020.