

**WESTON-SUPER- MARE TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE TOURISM AND LEISURE COMMITTEE
HELD VIA ZOOM
ON MONDAY 7TH DECEMBER 2020**

Meeting Commenced: 7.00 pm

Meeting Concluded: 8.00 pm

PRESENT: Peter Crew (Chairman), John Crockford-Hawley, David Dash, Catherine Gibbons, David Hitchins, Peter McAleer, Alan Peak and Sonia Russe.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Tania Middlemiss (Assistant Town Clerk), Caroline Darlington (Tourism Manager), Emma Williams (Tourism Marketing Officer), Fay Powell (Grounds Manager), Samantha Bishop (Committee Officer and Office Manager) and Sarah Pearse (Deputy Town Clerk).

107	<p>Apologies of Absence and Notifications of Substitutions</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ella Sayce with no substitution.</p> <p>Councillors Marc Aplin, James Clayton, and Marcia Pepperall were absent from the meeting.</p>
108	<p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest received.</p>
109	<p>To approve the accuracy of the minutes of the Tourism and Leisure Committee meeting held on the 27th July 2020</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting had been previously circulated with the agenda.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes be approved as a true record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.</p>
110	<p>Tourism Function Update</p> <p>The reports of the Tourism Manager and Tourism Marketing Officer October - December 2020 had been previously circulated with the agenda.</p> <p>The Tourism Manager reported that disaster recovery plans were being considered. The recent news of a vaccine being rolled out was fantastic and it was hoped to generate positivity. The team was ready to assist when and where it could and would await the next announcement from government on 16th December with regards to tiers.</p> <p>1 Events – Placemaking 2 Support for VW members 3 VW Partnership Working & Initiatives</p>

Placemaking meetings had been very active to elevate the town centre. The Visitor Economy team at NSC had recently announced their partnership with Visit Somerset, which was surprising to the Tourism Manager.

It was brought to member's attention that the council paid £1,500 per year to Visit Somerset for support and promotion of Weston-super-Mare on their website and upon analysis, that this had amounted to only 260 referrals to the Visit Weston website, which was very disappointing.

As part of their agreement with NSC, Visit Somerset have offered 40 free membership packages for NSC to distribute to local businesses at their discretion, which was in direct competition with Visit Weston. Visit Somerset had offered free memberships to members in the past, where free membership only lasted for 1 year and renewal costs were too high, thus they then rejoined Love Weston (as it was previously called). The council had resolved to extend members free membership, to be reviewed as a gesture of goodwill.

A member raised her disappointment that the council had joined Visit Somerset as they did not support coastline destinations and felt that the council should pull out of the membership.

The Vice Chairman asked if concerns over the number of referrals had been brought up at any board meetings held by Visit Somerset, and if the council had been invited to attend, as initially promised.

The Town Clerk advised that he had attended various board meetings of Visit Somerset and found them to be useful in passing on information. He advised continuing with the membership for a further year to establish better links.

The Chairman added that previously, some members of North Somerset Council had not wanted to rejoin Visit Somerset.

A suggested alteration to the Visit Weston partnership scheme might be to emulate the offer between the department at the BID. Visit Weston had given the BID four 'zonal' Platinum memberships, promoting all businesses in designated areas, rather than individually, making it a more affordable option.

A member added that she felt that a 'zonal' approach to the town centre planning would be beneficial to the town, its businesses and visitors, unfamiliar with the area. And that it would be better to know what they would find in what location and referred to Clevedon and Clifton as good examples of this approach.

The Tourism Manager advised that this information was available on the Visit Weston website. And that it would be possible to promote businesses in this way in the future, should the partnership scheme evolve as suggested. The Tourism Manager added that she was in communications with Weston College to develop a short film with students, promoting the town and what to do in Weston, which could be shown onboard coaches travelling to Weston, and that coach companies were very excited about this prospect.

The Chairman was in favour of offering group memberships and highlighted the need for better town centre signage.

The Chairman then proposed that an 80% discount be given to Visit Weston members for the year 2021/2022.

A vote was then taken and **carried**.

110.1 RESOLVED: That an 80% discount be offered to Visit Weston members within the 2021/22 budget.

4 VIC Location

The Tourism Manager explained that the future location of the VIC would have an impact income for the tourism department, as she predicted a reduction income from partnership fees following this year's refunds and the financial difficulties many businesses are experiencing.

The Chairman informed that the item would be discussed under item 5.3 of the agenda.

5 Destination Advertising

The Tourism Marketing Officer directed members to the contract renewal section of her report, where it advised that 2020/2021 was the third and final year of the existing contract with the department's website provider, Simpleview. The department had recently met with the account manager to discuss retention and/or renewal options for the Visit Weston website.

Simpleview were understandably keen to retain the contract with Visit Weston and had provided three renewal cost options for consideration as outlined in the report.

There would be a three-month notice period if the council chose not to renew the contact, and so it was felt timely to bring it to member's attention at this point and considering the workload and timescales involved with the procurement process. With this in mind, it was the recommendation of Officers to renew the contract for 1 year. The council had a good working relationship with Simpleview and they were the market leaders providing many value added services.

The Chairman proposed the recommendation, which was seconded and

A vote was then taken and **carried**.

110.2 RESOLVED: To renew the website contact with Simpleview for 1 year at the cost of £10,465.

A member questioned the accuracy and value of website analytics and whether the council was seeing a worthwhile return on its associated costs. The member also suggested that an external audit might be necessary.

The Tourism Manger informed that the Visit Weston website had over 1 million hits that were all tracked and information was regularly reported. Simpleview shared extremely good information with Visit Weston.

The Tourism Marketing Officer advised that the analysis was undertaken by herself via Google Analytics, as well as by Simpleview, and was constantly monitored. The data was analysed at depth, and added that to illustrate an

	<p>example, reported that there had been a 25% decrease in web traffic on the previous year, but noted that last year 26% of all traffic was enquiries into events that had not taken place in 2020 due to Covid.</p> <p>The Tourism and Marketing Officer informed that the only advertising campaign undertaken, was with Pear Communications. Two campaigns had been budgeted for Easter and early Summer.</p> <p>110.3 RESOLVED: That the report be noted.</p>
<p>111.</p>	<p>Parks and Play Areas</p> <p>The report of the Grounds Manager had been previously circulated.</p> <p>5.1 Parks and Play Areas</p> <p>The Grounds Manager advised that the Winter maintenance program was underway.</p> <p>5.2 Water Park</p> <p>The Water Park had been subject to mass spray paint vandalism which needed to be removed. This had been reported to the Police and there had been other incidents reported around the town. A meeting that week was scheduled to discuss the issue further. The Rangers had added the Water Park to their patrols to help target this.</p> <p>A works programme agreement was in place with Somerset Wood Recycling and a meeting was scheduled to discuss artwork.</p> <p>5.3 Water Park Café</p> <p>Request to review license</p> <p>The report of the Town Clerk had been previously circulated to members earlier that day.</p> <p>The Town Clerk apologised for the late submission of the report and for the benefit of members reiterated the report.</p> <p>In 2017 the council provided an improved refreshment kiosk with indoor as well as outdoor seating areas. A new licence covering the three summer seasons 2019, 2020 and 2021 was granted commencing in 2019-20 and was due to run until 2021-22, ending in March 2022.</p> <p>Business had been badly affected by the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020 and the concession licence holder had requested a change to the terms of his licence. Emphasising the lack of trade for much of this year and argued that the ability to be able to trade throughout the year. There was one summer season remaining on the current agreement and the loss of the current year's trading had completely undermined the five-year business projections for the investment made in the Water Park. The loss of trading coupled with further improvements made during February and early March consumed what little profit derived from the summer.</p>

The kiosk roof had been leaky since day one and continued to do so, and the security shutters needed improving. In return for a 10-year lease, with the usual 5-year review, the concessionaire would assume responsibility for the repair and maintenance of the kiosk, including completion of current repairs and all future maintenance. He had suggested a starting point for rent of the already agreed amount for 2021 £7,000, followed by an increase up to £8,900 for years 2022-25 inclusive, this represented an annual increase of 10% up to 2025. However, this would depend on operation of the Water Pad and admissions similar to 2019.

The Town Clerk had carefully considered this in discussion with the Chairman and colleague officers. The concessionaire's request to be completely rent free in 2020 was a little ambitious, given many landlords and others have been offering 3 months' rent free and North Somerset have not even done that with their concessionaires.

There was significant Government help available for small and self-employed businesses.

Looking towards 2021. There was now hope for a vaccine sooner than anticipated, plus mass testing, which together would give realistic hope of a full season's operation being possible from April 2021. There was a remaining degree of uncertainty about next year but Covid permitting it was the intention to both open the park and operate the splash pad if legally allowed to do so, and by using its own staff to ensure the toilets were open for reasonable times throughout the season.

Taking into account these considerations, The Town Clerk recommend the committee to offer an agreement for a 50% reduction in the rent for 2020 plus a 50% reduction in rent for 2021. The reduction for 2021 to be whatever the outcome re coronavirus, so would apply even if the concessionaire had a full year's operation, and overall he would have had a reduction of 1 whole year's rent during the term of his concession licence for the water park café.

With regards to the request for a 10-year extension of the current 3-year licence, The Town Clerk felt it would be premature to agree any extension at this time, as it could not be known what future trading conditions for the café or the water park would be in 2021 or beyond and a 10-year extension would tie the town council's hands long into the future.

Replacement of Entrance Hut with a new Cabin

In 2021 it was proposed not to renew the previous contract with North Somerset to operate the Water Park making a saving of £35,000. Instead by combining the budgets for seasonal staffing of the Water Park and VIC, an efficiency saving could be made with a joint group of staff providing visitor information, managing admission to the water park and if capacity allowed, possibly acting as 'Weston Welcomers' along the seafront directing people to the water park and other attractions.

NSC currently provided a temporary hut for their staff in order to operate the park directly, the town council would need to provide its own cabin (this would require the consent of NSC under the lease). The Tourism Manager has been consulted

and supports the proposition that, whether or not the VIC remained in the Tropicana or a different more central location, a supplementary visitor information facility could be made available at the water park. Budget provision of up to £25,000 was proposed in 2021/22 for a larger cabin with double doors that would have space for VIC leaflets and materials and be more accessible in the event of lingering Covid restrictions.

The Grounds Manager reported that exploration into utilising Clara's Café to provide uniform catering across sites was being undertaken.

In response to a member, regarding the council's ready position if the offer was declined. The Grounds Manager informed that staff were eager and it was achievable.

A vote was then taken and **carried**.

111.1 RESOLVED:

1. That the café concessionaire be offered a 50% reduction in rent for each of the years 2020/21 and 2021/22, with a decision by required before the Policy and Finance Committee on the 14th December 2020.
2. That no agreement be given at the present time to extend the café licence from 2021.
3. That the Water Park be directly operated by the council in 2021 and a new cabin be installed for combined park admissions and visitor information.

The Grounds Manager reported that Ellenborough Park West was officially open and had received much interest.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.00 pm.

Signed: Dated:

Chairman of the Tourism & Leisure Committee