

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-066-2014/15
Date of meeting: 4 February 2016



Portfolio: Asset and Economic Development
Subject: Extension Visitor and Tourism Development post
Responsible Officer: John Houston (01992 564094).
Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) The Cabinet agree a District Development Fund growth bid in the sum of £35,000 for 2016/17 to fund a one year extension to the Visitor and Tourism Development Officer post; and**
- (2) That external partnership funding be sought for future years before any further extension is considered.**

Executive Summary:

Tourism has been identified as a key emerging growth sector in the Local Plan. It currently generates almost £200m of income to the local economy and provides almost 7% of local jobs. Partners in the industry and the neighbouring local authorities are working together to grow this sector, around the many current attractions and potential future attractions and opportunities. Members agreed to a one year contract to examine the potential growth in the industry and support the emerging Local Plan evidence base. Work has identified a range of opportunities to grow and support the industry locally, see Appendix 1. The current post is funded to March 16. The One Epping Forest Economic Board has discussed and requested an extension to the current post to enable this work to continue and key projects completed. This report recommends an extension of one year funded by the District Council and proposes that other partners are canvassed to secure joint funding for any future extension.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Tourism is a key economic development and growth priority in the emerging Local Plan. This has recently been ratified by Members at the Local Plan economic development workshop. There are other projects driven by Members in conjunction with partner organisations that require ongoing support, input and management. These include the Visit Epping Forest programme of events i.e. website relaunch, tourism summit, cross border/joint promotion and marketing via the Tourism board and Local Plan Co-op group.

Other Options for Action:

To not extend the role. This would allow for the delivery of minimal work associated with the Local Plan evidence base. There would however not be the capacity to identify and deliver new tourism opportunities to the detriment of the local economy, and maintain ongoing liaison, with neighbouring authorities, private organisations and other public sector bodies, as

required under the National Planning Policy Framework Duty to Cooperate.

Report:

1. The Epping Forest District is predominately a peaceful and green environment with market towns, villages and hamlets many of which are unspoilt and retain charm and character. This contrasts with the surrounding areas which are experiencing change via economic growth. These include regeneration in Enfield, the London Cambridge Stanstead Corridor, Thames Gateway and Harlow Enterprise Zones. Vital to these venues ability to attract new business is the environment in which employees will live and key to this is the range of leisure activities within attractive locations available on their doorstep. These visitors, allied to tourism from further afield, and increasing awareness and cross promotion of the local offer to the district's residents, form the background to the range of opportunities open to tourism and visitor development within the Epping Forest district. The district has the forest, an award winning heritage steam railway and bus service, one of the most complete and operational WW2 airfields in the country complete with an enviable range of war planes, the oldest wooden church in Europe, many miles of attractive footpaths including the start of the Essex Way, historic Waltham Abbey with nearby Copped Hall, the Royal Gunpowder Mills and Lee Valley with its White Water Centre. We have parks, reserves and other beautiful natural features plus award winning restaurants, pubs, shopping/markets and café culture. These attractions are all within easy reach of London and the rapidly expanding tourist hub at Stansted. Partners from the private and public sectors have identified this as a 'golden opportunity period' to develop a top tourist/visitor destination and reap the economic rewards whilst maintaining the green and unspoilt nature of the district that residents view as off primary importance.

2. The Tourism and Visitor Board was established last year following recommendations from the Tourism Taskforce set up in March 2012 to explore the economic benefits offered by growing the district's tourism opportunities. Chaired by Cllr Boyce, the taskforce contained representation from all the major stakeholders across the district including the Corporation of London and Lee Valley Parks. This was the first time these major operators had met which stimulated the sharing of information and cross promotion. The group found significant scope for future developments and recommended the formation of the Board, the continuance on an annual basis of the Tourism Conference it had launched, management and development of the successful website it had launched and the appointment of a Tourism Development Manager to manage the new relationships formed with district and external stakeholders and coordinate fledgling and future projects being taken forward.

3. An initial Tourism and Marketing Manager contract for one year funded solely by Epping Forest District Council, (since extended to the end of the financial year), has resulted in projects being taken forward and new opportunities being identified. Stronger and ongoing links with key bodies such as Visit Essex have also been formed. As a result the following have been achieved:

4. Tourism and Visitor Board meetings take place four times a year with dates currently set till the end of 2016. Key stakeholders regularly attend these meetings which are a forum for presentation and discussion, member's updates and guidance/approval of current projects. It is hoped that for future years the participants on the Tourism Board could contribute partnership funding to extend the Tourism Development Post role.

5. A database of 175 local businesses directly involved in tourism has been created and is being added to on a regular basis. This has created the core of e-newsletter mailings and invitations to tourism conferences and has been used as a source of information by various stakeholders.

6. Marketing material promoting the district has been produced including leaflets, banners and a display stand. These have been used, and continue to be used, at a number of trade and customer facing fairs co-ordinated by the Tourism Development Manager as well as wider distribution via venues across the district. A brand has been developed for consistency in promoting the district which extends across material to the website.

7. A successful second tourism conference was held in 2015 which attracted over eighty delegates. Feed-back confirmed 100% satisfaction and demand for it to be held annually. A third conference is taking place in March 2016 at the start of English Tourism Week. A conference and seminar was also created to explain and help local tourism make the most of the opportunities offered when the Tour de France came through the district which was also very well attended.

8. The website launched initially by the Task and Finish Group has been updated with a members section and acts as a portal for events within the district via the "What's On" section. The site gets around 1000 views per week and members report a referral rate better than that from sites such as Visit Essex. Conference delegates have expressed the need for the website to be updated to contain more editorial and work across all devices and this work is currently being undertaken.

9. Tourism data for the district has been analysed and indicates the areas for development where the district's offer and economic development could benefit the most. This includes developing the evening/night economy and longer stays which are currently hampered by the low number of beds and lack of appropriate accommodation. The Epping Forest District tourism market is growing annually and currently brings in around £200m and accounts for 7% of all employment.

10. There is a need to generate regional and wider awareness of the district as a destination to bring in more visitors and benefit from the secondary spend they provide. One such event, a centenary air show to celebrate North Weald Airfield's formation during WW1 was unfortunately cancelled but has allowed for the reinstatement of a major North Weald air show in 2017 and this is hoped to be the beginning of a regular and growing event. A district-wide Jazz Festival, to be held in the autumn is being planned with support from many quarters across the district especially the National Jazz Archive which is based at the library in Loughton. Partners have been invited to join together to create an initial event which again could be developed into a larger regular fixture.

11. One of the first benefits of the original Tourism Task Force meetings was the opportunities for cross promotion between businesses and this continues to be the case with the Tourism and Visitor Board especially as new members join. Recently Vibrant Partnerships, Mulberry House and the Secret Nuclear Bunker asked to become involved and already these have provided fresh opportunities for joint working. Extending the benefits of joint working, the Tourism Development Manager has been representing the district on a cross-border project with Broxbourne and East Herts businesses in conjunction with Lee Valley Parks and the White Water Centre. This group are looking to replicate the work done by the Tourism Task and Finish Group and identify and link businesses and opportunities across the area in and around the Lee Valley where district and county borders have traditionally separated joined-up.

Resource Implications:

£35,000 DDF for one year extension comprising of £30,000 Salary Costs and £5,000 Project Budget. Potential for external partner funding to be explored for future years.

Legal and Governance Implications:

No specific implications.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The environmental impact of tourism is considered in developing activities and events.

Consultation Undertaken:

One Epping Forest Member Economic Board
Chairman of the Tourism Board
Director of Neighbourhoods

Background Papers:

Cabinet report Feb 2014:
Establishment of an Economic Development Strategy
<http://haako/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=295&MId=7397&Ver=4>

Risk Management:

If external funding is not secured, the long term benefits of the work of the Tourism and Economic Boards may not be delivered. Tourism plays an important role in terms of economic activity and employment. To not extend the role may compromise the ability to provide this area through the local plan.

Due Regard Record

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people; and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

The work undertaken by the Tourism and Visitor Development officer supports the delivery of projects that benefit all residents and relevant business and organisations in the district and targets one of the Council's key economic priorities.

TOURISM/VISITOR DELIVERY PLAN

PRIORITIES FOR NEXT TWO YEARS

1. Secure funding/capacity for tourism development work
2. Redesign/relaunch visitor website
3. Produce and circulate new promotional material, leaflets, posters, pop up banners etc.
4. Develop autumn festival concept around specific jazz festival, and 'Epping in the fall' promotions
5. Campaign for additional brown signs for key attractions
6. Identify and deliver common development plan for new opportunity area around border of Waltham abbey/Broxbourne, ensure maximum benefit from investment flowing from PGL/White Water/Town Mead/Corporation assets, through coordinated planning
7. Develop cross border opportunities for joint investment bids, Broxbourne, east Herts, Harlow and Uttlesford
8. Ensure key plans and strategies (ECC/SELEP, EFDC Local Plan) are amended to deliver increased tourism capacity, particularly hotel/bed growth
9. Establish and develop relationships to promote area as destination for expanding Chinese tourist industry
10. Look with partners for new opportunities to increase activity and income around tourism/visitor at North weald Airfield
11. Monitor districts economic performance in this sector and produce Tourism Annual report for Annual Tourism Summit.