

## POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

REPORT TO:	Corporate Performance Panel		
DATE:	1 September 2021		
TITLE:	The changing of service and location of Hunstanton TIC into a Tourist Information Point at Alive Oasis		
TYPE OF REPORT:	Post Implementation Review		
PORTFOLIO(S):	Councillor Graham Middleton		
REPORT AUTHOR:	Phil Eke		
OPEN/EXEMPT	OPEN	WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FUTURE CABINET REPORT:	No

### **THE CHANGING OF SERVICE AND LOCATION OF HUNSTANTON TIC INTO A TOURIST INFORMATION POINT AT ALIVE OASIS**

#### **PURPOSE OF REPORT/SUMMARY:**

Report issued by the Tourism Department in response to the following previous statement by a member of the panel: ***"It is crucial that the only major tourist town in West Norfolk with thousands of tourists visiting every day requires a manned tourist office"***.

This report, in response, highlights the steady national and regional decline in traditional TIC services and the lack of any clear link between an area not having a TIC and the level of tourism income to that area. The report also describes the new options and setup in Hunstanton with regards to tourism enquiries.

#### **KEY ISSUES:**

- Traditional TICs, though certainly a nice service to have, are not vital to the ongoing tourism income within any location in modern times. In 2012 VisitEngland issued their report "Case studies: Alternative Information delivery models" in response to TICs becoming less important to the tourism industry in the age of the internet/online booking and, from 2017, VisitEngland stopped accrediting Tourist information Centres and ceased all official ongoing TIC-specific information resources. In essence, TICs only now exist in name only and are increasingly rare (most often integrating with another existing community service to survive in some way), with a great many TICs having closed around the country and region over the past 20 years. For example: VisitScotland closed 39 information centres in 2017 and subsequently reported a tourism boom from Spring 2018 onwards, to present day. Since that time, Norwich, Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds have all closed their TICs, alongside a great many throughout England (such as the TIC in Oxford).
- In 2019, visitors to the Hunstanton TIC decreased to less than a third of the visitors they had received in 1999.
- It would thus be fair to say that the signs are at least far from good for a resurgence of national or regional investment in the traditional manned Tourist Information Centre service. A strong business case isn't there for it. This is especially the case

now considering that, since the pandemic started, national household access to the internet has boomed up to 96% of all households, a steady increase of 26% over the past decade (Statista Survey 2020).

- Since almost the beginning of the pandemic, VisitEngland and local Destination Management Organisations like Visit West Norfolk have been conveying the national tourism industry message to tourists that it is vital to “Know Before You Go” (to research places to visit at the time of their online accommodation booking – certainly not to wait until you arrive at your destination to find out which venues have reopened and which venues strictly need online booking at this time).

#### OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

- The formation from May 17th 2021 of a **Tourist Information Point at Alive Oasis** in Hunstanton. This ‘TIP’ is placed at a key busy area of the town (on the southern promenade), contains a wide range of tourism literature, and there are staff on site who can possibly help with face-to-face tourism enquiries to some degree.
- The **Tourist Information Centre element of the Stories of Lynn venue** in King’s Lynn does also still deal with email and telephone enquiries for Hunstanton and west Norfolk as a whole.
- The publicly-accessible independently-run **Visitor Centre at Deepdale Backpackers** has reopened to provide tourism leaflets to visitors who pop in from the coast.
- The **Hunstanton Heritage Centre** expressed an interest in having a **Tourist Information Point** - a slightly scaled-down version to the one at Alive Oasis. Leaflets and posters have been supplied to the volunteer team there.
- The Tourism department believes that the proposed future plan for the relocated Hunstanton Library (Planning Application 20/00817/FM) would include an area specifically for becoming a **Tourist Information Point** too, of course with library staff at hand on site.
- **Tourism leaflet distributors** such as X-LT and Best4Promotions still conduct routine deliveries of leaflets within the Hunstanton area (after a break of service during the various lockdowns in recent times). Having a good level of printed tourist information available is still seen as desirable if possible (especially if 4G signal is poor on some devices at the time of the visit).
- Visitors to the **Visit West Norfolk tourism website** (including the five key sections about Hunstanton) and their other platforms have increased exponentially across the pandemic (and a steady increase in annual website visits before that time)
- 40,000 new copies of the Tourism Department’s annual **Hunstanton Mini Guide** leaflet and handy map were distributed around the area from June 2021 onwards for visitors to pick up and use across the summer and beyond, into next year. Updated Hunstanton leaflets like our *Hunstanton Wolf Trail* and *Horticultural Trail* titles are also to be found in the Alive Oasis Tourist Information Point.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

A lack of a strong business case for reintroduction of a traditional TIC service in the town indicates **no further action required**, especially in line with current tourism enquiry support

options in the area. Generally, this is in line with the evidenced 20-year decline in traditional TIC services in the UK tourism industry and, as such, not simply specific to Hunstanton and its March 2020 TIC closure in particular.

Also of note, all current reports and observations (anecdotal at this time) indicate Hunstanton has almost consistently had a great deal of visitors across this summer thus far, despite the lack of a traditional TIC in the town for the past two summer seasons, giving no evidence nor indication that the town's tourism trade is suffering from the lack of a TIC service (though, granted, the ongoing effects of the pandemic on the past two summer seasons of tourism trade is likely having more impact on visitor numbers than any lack of a TIC service).

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

N/A