

HUNSTANTON Tourist Information Centre

Background Notes – March 2020 to March 2021

During the first national lockdown, which began on March 23rd 2020, Hunstanton TIC was closed down. This closure was effected with no consultation or communication with local residents or businesses – not even by email or by letter. Such disregard for local people and their opinions on this matter smacks of total arrogance and contempt for those who pay their Council Tax costs to BCKLWN.

The 'decision' to close Hunstanton's TIC was taken by a small number of BCKLWN representatives and an equal number of Hunstanton Town Councillors, behind closed doors.

No transparency. No note of the meeting, other than the one obtained under an FOI request.

A total erosion of local democracy through the back door of the Covid-19 scenario.

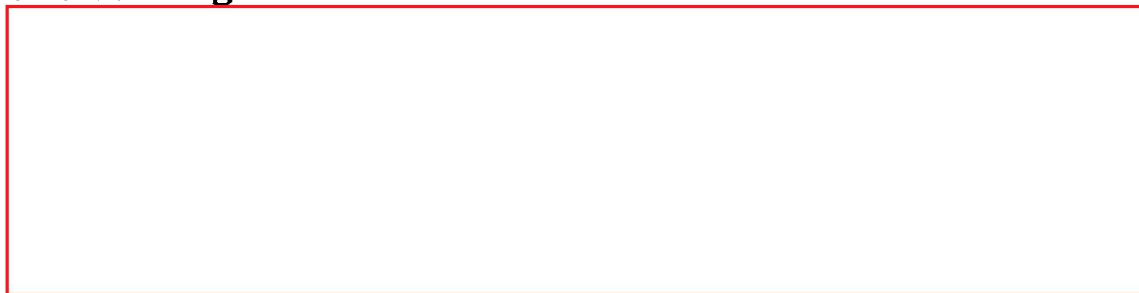
In June 2020, the then Mayor of Hunstanton released a statement announcing the closure of Hunstanton TIC.

Between June 2020 and March 2021 an active campaign by a group of Hunstanton residents, called for a reinstatement of a staffed Hunstanton TIC. They met with Cllr Nockolds, the then Portfolio Holder for Culture, Health and Heritage. She undertook to review the situation. The campaign group were not invited to join the review, and, once again, a decision was simply passed

We do not know the scope of this review nor under which informed evidence it was conducted.

The outcome of Cllr Nockold's review was not to reinstate a staffed TIC facility in Hunstanton but to locate a Tourist Information Point within the Alive Oasis café.

To this very date, the August Bank Holiday 2021, there is absolutely zero signage on the front or the sides of the building indicating the provision of tourist literature within this building.



Alive West Norfolk had no problem putting up a banner advertising their own activities within Alive Oasis over the summer months – but no parallel banner alongside it about tourism information.

This alone speaks volumes of the zero importance attached to providing tourists to Hunstanton with a service of any sort.

The case for not restoring a staffed TIC in Hunstanton centred on the following two arguments by Cllr Nockolds –
“that everyone has a smartphone these days and that everyone goes online for tourist information.”

Both of these arguments are totally wrong and were used as the justification for the closure of Norwich TIC too.

There is absolutely no evidence to support the view that everyone in Hunstanton and everyone living in or visiting Hunstanton has a smartphone. Even if they did, mobile reception on Hunstanton seafront is so poor that no calls could be made or information retrieved. What has been conveniently overlooked in the midst of all of the posturing about mobile phones, internet etc is that Hunstanton TIC provided information and services for local residents, a larger than UK average proportion of whom are not digitally-enabled, for one reason or another and who do not have family members close by.

At a full BCKLWN meeting held on Thursday January 21st 2021, a member of the public asked for a reconsideration of the closure of the staffed Hunstanton TIC.

All Councillors were informed that the costs of operating a staffed TIC in Hunstanton (43.000 pounds SLA) had equated to just 0.1 of 1% of the total annual budget figure for BCKLWN. Hardly major outlay.

Cllr Long, at this same meeting, made a statement to say that the decision to close Hunstanton TIC had been taken by Hunstanton Town Council and not by BCKLWN and he furthermore went on to state that the number of tourists to Hunstanton TIC had 'decreased massively' over recent years. When asked for the evidence behind these words, he failed to produce it.





I quote from Hunstanton Town Council's Report 2019/2020 as follows:

"Hunstanton Town Council received an annual subsidy from the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk to provide the services of a Tourist Information Centre (TIC) in the 2019/2020 financial year for the benefit of visitors and residents.

Popular services have included the processing of parking permits, not only for residents but also for businesses and visitors to the town, ticket sales for local attractions, often at reduced prices and tickets for the popular pantomime held in the Town Hall at Christmas.

The excellent and knowledgeable staff ensure that local businesses are promoted.


A wide selection of leaflets are stocked for hundreds of local attractions as well as bus timetables, Holiday guides, 'Where to go' guides and Hunstanton mini Guide.

Tickets are sold for all local events, whether purchased over the phone or mailed out."

April 2021 to present date

So.....where are we now?



A Tourist Information Point in a seafront building, with no clear  visible signage whatsoever.

Thousands upon thousands of tourists and visitors will have walked along the prom between April and today's date, totally unaware of any tourism information within the building.

This all smacks of no interest in tourism whatsoever from the BCKLWN, and no forward-thinking at all.

Shame upon officers of this Borough.

Hunstanton is our coastal tourism magnet. Its economy depends on tourism. Lives, livelihoods and family incomes depend upon tourism. Hunstanton is the ONLY seaside town in the BCKLWN portfolio and it certainly deserves better than zero signage for a non-staffed facility.



 What happened to the Wayne Hemingway proposals? Washed out on the tides?




Hunstanton could be, and has the potential to be, a real full-on, all-year round destination resort – but it requires a massive amount of 'thinking outside the box' and an equal amount of creative, innovative thinking, consultation and

decision-making (not to mention funding) to bring the town to life and to put it well and truly on the list of 'must visit' seaside towns in the UK.



Where and when will the process begin? A good start would be for the new portfolio holder for Tourism, Cllr Middleton, along with Philip Eke, to come and engage with Hunstanton's businesses and residents and to really get to grips with designing a fit-for-purpose 21st century seaside town with an integrated community hub, incorporated with a staffed services (including tourism information) facility for businesses, residents and visitors alike.

At the risk of stating the obvious, people go into Tourist Information Centres to source information. Information about local attractions and much, much more. This in turn, acts as a driver for local businesses, and, once again, in turn, boosts the town's economy.

For the record, from the survey of 106 of the businesses in Hunstanton carried out in July 2020, the percentage of businesses which highlighted in their comments a variety of negative effects of the closure of the staffed TIC on the town's local business economy as a whole was 70%. 






I totally reject Mr Eke's argument that there is not a business case for a staffed Tourist Information Centre in Hunstanton.

By spending time in Hunstanton engaging with business owners and talking with residents and other stakeholders, Cllr Middleton and Mr Eke could then listen to what they are saying rather than making a 'decision' about what is 'best' for them.

I note that Mr Eke's report has been marked as 'not for forwarding to a Cabinet meeting'.

I hereby recommend that this suggestion be overthrown and that the future of Hunstanton's tourism be a priority for debate and development at both BCKLWN level and at local level in Hunstanton.



Just because other town and cities (often with well-developed and comprehensive signposting and signage) have closed their Tourist Information Centres does not mean that Hunstanton has to fall in line and do the same.

Let's 'buck the trend' and showcase what a thriving Tourist Information Centre can do – for businesses, residents and visitors alike.

Where there is a political will to do so, there IS a way.

I am ready and willing to be an active, working member of the task force which I have just outlined and look forward to getting started.

B Cllr Paul Beal