

Item: Tourism Marketing Update

Committee: King's Lynn & West Norfolk Area Museums Committee

Date: 09th October 2023

Report from: Senior Tourism Officer, Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk

1 Introduction

The report provides updates for the Area Museums Committee on tourism marketing and development activities from March 2023 to the start of October 2023.

2 Printed marketing

2.1 2023 Where to Stay in West Norfolk

The 2023 edition of the *Where to Stay in West Norfolk* booklet of local accommodation was published in April 2023, ahead of the summer season. This booklet is primarily made for the King's Lynn Tourist Information Centre to send out upon request and to give out to visitors to their service in the King's Lynn Town Hall. The booklet is in a rolling perpetual print to meet demand (with major updates at the start of each calendar year). It is still free-of-charge for west Norfolk accommodation businesses to appear in the booklet at this time, and the amount of accommodation entries continues to grow over time.

2.2 Discover King's Lynn

The 2023 edition of this popular leaflet of ours was published and circulated from mid-April 2023. The print run is still 160,000 copies, with large quantities subsequently distributed around the area's venues and businesses by two regional distribution companies.

2.3 Hunstanton Mini Guide and Downham Market Mini Guide

Work on the 2023 edition of the Hunstanton Mini Guide was complete in May 2023, with the latest edition of the Downham Market Mini Guide being complete in July. We ran with another 40,000 copies of the updated *Hunstanton Mini Guide* and a slightly increased quantity of 15,000 copies of the updated *Downham Market Mini Guide* for this year too. As highlighted in our previous report to the Museums Committee our department waits for almost total stock clearance of all of our leaflets as we work towards zero waste with our printed titles. As a consequence, some tourism venues may run out of our leaflets for a period of time before we go to reprint.

2.4 Other publications

The Borough Council supported the King's Lynn Town Guides once again by arranging the print and distribution of the *2023 King's Lynn Guided Walks* programme ahead of the Eastertime start of the Town Guides' new programme of walks (alongside our support with some of the Town Guides promotional materials too). We conducted another reprint of the *King's Lynn Maritime Trail* booklet in July 2023 (supplying both usual stockists of the King's Lynn TIC and True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum with copies from this rolling print job to meet the ongoing demand).

The Tourism Department gave its usual support to the print and distribution of the *King's Lynn Heritage Open Day 2023* booklet in late August-early September, ahead of the open day event which was held in King's Lynn town centre on Sunday September 10th 2023. See a summarised report of this event under item 3.3.

3 Digital marketing

3.1 www.visitwestnorfolk.com

As highlighted in the previous report to the King's Lynn & West Norfolk Area museums Committee, the new version of our main visitor website (Visit West Norfolk) is now over a year old and, across the months since that time, it continues to see regular changes and refinements to aspects of the design, coding and content to better match the expectations of the modern visitor. The website design work was undertaken and led by the BCKLWN Web Team with ongoing input and Wordpress updates being made by the Tourism department's Tourism Support Officer.

It should be highlighted once again that the website features example itinerary experiences in relation to **Group and Tour Visits to West Norfolk** (with initial focus on attracting group visits to King's Lynn) and we have previously reported to the Area Museums committee on much of the commissioned work we do to attract groups to the area each year. The Tourism department recognises that there needs to be more focus on attracting even more group tours to the town (and we mention non-digital planned activity for group tours under item 4.2.2 of this report). However, the Tourism department believes King's Lynn will prove to be an even stronger draw as a main destination for group operators when some of the town's major heritage venues are more regularly accessible by visitors. Heritage assets may not be able to meet expectations from group visits if there is an assumption by visitors that heritage venues within the town are regularly and reliably open and accessible. Heritage venues naturally feature heavily in the Tourism department's promotion of King's Lynn and it may well be the case of concentrating extra resources on promoting the town to tour operators once all heritage venues are regularly open for visitors (and, ideally, with some regular programmed activities as part of their opening hours). In particular, the Tourism Department looks forward to the ongoing regeneration of the Guildhall of St George as a major draw for the town, with the venue's rich high profile history likely having international group tour operator appeal as regeneration of the site continues. The Tourism department also wishes to co-ordinate future boosts of town centre promotion to group operators in line with the outcomes and aims of the forthcoming West Norfolk Car Park Strategy and major regeneration projects related to the King's Lynn town centre and riverside.

2023 Website Campaigns: 'Greener West Norfolk' and 'Visit West Norfolk...Naturally'

The department began a 10-month-long paid digital marketing green tourism campaign from March 1st 2023 (and it continues to at least the end of the calendar year), aiming to attract new environmentally-conscious visitors to our website and to help cultivate responsible tourism within the west Norfolk area in general. The campaign was initially branded as 'Greener West Norfolk', with radio spots being commissioned for airing on radio stations in London and in the North-East of the UK across the 2023 springtime period, in time to attract domestic tourism to the area for the 2023 summer season.

The tourism department's wide range of new content for this 'Greener West Norfolk' online campaign, including downloadable guides related to both responsible tourism for visitors and sustainable tourism tips for businesses, came under a fresh rebrand as 'Visit West Norfolk...Naturally' in late summer 2023, bookended by a new digital radio campaign throughout September 2023 - this time focussed purely on attracting out-of-season visitors from affluent areas of London.

This environmentally-aware campaign's new 'Visit West Norfolk...Naturally' brand mirrors the region-wide shared-branding with the rest of the East Anglia tourism marketing network

led by Visit East of England. More details about VEE's own campaign here:

<https://rb.gy/mcx54>

www.explorewestnorfolk.co.uk

We continue to promote our *Explore West Norfolk* website and two related apps in our e-shots and other marketing materials, and we continue to plan brand new trail content for this digital platform throughout 2023-24. Such trails include:

Norfolk Coast: Myths & Legends – a cross-Norfolk-boundaries major trail project led by the tourism department, including aspects of Lord Nelson's local history and the more colourful aspects of our coastal history for cross-demographic appeal. This large-scale trail is now in mid-production, with all original commissioned artwork (much created by a local artist) now being complete as of Summer 2023. The department's aim is to launch this trail as a celebration of the Norfolk Coast Path section from King's Lynn to Snettisham, soon to be redeveloped by the NCC Norfolk Trails team, any such launch possibly happening during Spring 2024.

King's Lynn Walsingham Way (KLWW) – the Tourism department continues to be an active partner of this locally-led project (headed by The King's Lynn Minster Parish Trust charity) to establish a new trail and waymarker posts, from the town to Walsingham. An extensive business case document was recently commissioned and, as of Summer 2023, the document is now complete, with external funding options subsequently being explored by this group.

The Tourism department's next step in support of this project is to create a GPX map file of the whole KLWW route for upload to their Explore West Norfolk website and app before the close of 2023, so that the general public can access, test and follow the route for the first time, ahead of any physical waymarking phase being undertaken by the project leads.

Downham Market Gingerbread Town Trail – from February to August 2023 ongoing discussions and joint working between Discover Downham, Downham Market Town Council and the Tourism department for a town-based heritage trail with potential for a high casual visitor appeal have resulted in the first proof being created of this A5 sized town trail booklet. As of late September 2023 this full proof of the trail booklet is currently being looked at by the Discover Downham Heritage Museum stakeholders for final comments and additions, before a suitable 2024 launch is organised.

3.2 Website traffic

Website figures for the whole calendar year of 2023 will be included in the next report (March 2024) with comparisons made to the previous full calendar years from 2019 onwards to identify any level of progress in website visits. Even though, at the time of writing this report, we are still in the midst of a month-long September 2023 digital radio campaign (currently airing in chosen areas of London) and consequently we do not know what the total engagement levels for this period will be until the campaign is complete, we can say with some confidence that our level of website visits for 2023 will have at least increased to being above the annual KPI for our website performance this calendar year.

3.3 Events

It was good to witness such a full programme of events happening throughout west Norfolk across 2023 in comparison to previous years of various nationwide restrictions, including King's Lynn Festival and Festival Too continuing to be very popular for the town as well as new events within the local area for the King's Coronation. The Tourism department hopes

that the footfall has been good for the whole of west Norfolk in 2023 despite the unreliable weather during this past summer season. Amongst a great many events happening in the area some notable highlights from around west Norfolk in recent months include 'Sean Scully at Houghton Hall – Smaller Than The Sky' (the world-renowned artist Sean Scully staging a major exhibition at Houghton Hall from 23 April, which continues to run up until 29 October 2023), 'Folk in A Field' (a sold-out expanded 4-day open-air event in rural West Acre), the current 'Heads & Tails' art exhibition held within King's Lynn's Guildhall of St George, and 'King's Lynn Heritage Open Day' (September 9th 2023). The main organisers of that event, King's Lynn Civic Society, has kindly offered the following update on this year's King's Lynn Heritage Open Day for this report:

“This year’s Heritage Open Day fell on one of the hottest September days on record, which presented some challenges, but didn’t prevent the crowds from turning out. There were a lot of ‘old favourites’ open (the Town Hall, Clifton House, St Nicholas’ Chapel and the Pilots’ Office), which proved just as popular as ever. And a few recent additions – the Pink House, the recently re-opened Crown & Mitre and the Lattice House on the buildings side, and new additions Brought to Life re-enactors, and the Kentwell Players added to the full entertainment programme. The activities in The Walks (re-enactors, falcons, archery, miniature railway) and the vintage buses were as popular as ever.”

The Tourism department is now looking forward to the forthcoming season of local festivals and events from Halloween to Christmas and beyond, with the duo of staff currently working on a great deal of seasonal multimedia content (including the department's current Halloween campaign which features a wealth of family-friendly content as well as a series of more adult-oriented seasonal content listed under our own campaign umbrella of "Fear and Haunting in West Norfolk"). In particular it is good to see King's Lynn welcoming the 'Fear in the Fens' festival for the very first time (a whole-day programme of events held on October 28th 2023 at the Alive Corn Exchange) after the festival's successful years in Downham Market in recent times. As folklore and 'dark tourism' hold notable appeal for lots of potential visitors in modern times, the department is keen to build upon our promotions and support for such out-of-season events with each passing year, at the same time as celebrating the unique character and colourful tales of west Norfolk in general.

3.4 Business e-shots

Local tourism businesses and organisations on the tourism department's business database continue to receive our fortnightly e-shots (the latest tourism business news in email format) and the department uses its 'Tourism Industry' and 'Useful Links' sections of the Visit West Norfolk website for local tourism businesses to find an archive of our e-shots, latest news and downloadable tourism reports. The tourism department continues to proactively engage with established venues, parishes and new west Norfolk tourism businesses to our tourism database for future communications. This engagement currently includes an area-wide reach out to village parishes to check the content we have with them and/or confirm such ongoing promotion of their villages.

Such Visit West Norfolk e-shots sent out to tourism-related contacts during the period covered by this report include (in order of most recent):

[September 2023] Accommodation Offers & Free Things To Do
[September 2023] King's Lynn Heritage Open Day | Sunday 10th September 2023
[August 2023] King's Lynn and West Norfolk Pride and Free Open Air Cinema
[July 2023] Summer Holiday Fun and Car-Free Travel
[June 2023] Summer Days in West Norfolk 2023

[June 2023] Father's Day in West Norfolk 2023
[May 2023] Hanseatic Festival of Watersports 2023
[May 2023] Spring Days in West Norfolk 2023
[April 2023] The Coronation of King Charles III | Celebrate in West Norfolk
[April 2023] Easter Weekend in West Norfolk
[March 2023] English Tourism Week 2023
[March 2023] Greener West Norfolk | Time To Explore with Greener Footsteps

3.5 Consumer e-shots

The scheduled programme of our regular Visit West Norfolk tourist-facing e-shots continue to be sent out to prospective visitors every fortnight. The content of each e-shot is usually a mix of themed content and promotions of a small set of events or attractions, accommodation and activities. The Tourism department wishes to significantly boost the number of visitors who sign-up to receive such information and are looking at allocating a section of the department's budget for online adverts in the near future to highlight this 'sign-up for news' aspect of our department's work.

4 **Planned activity**

4.1 The Tourism department's completed ***West Norfolk Tourism Development Plan 2022-26*** has been available as a download from the *Tourism Industry* section of our website since the start of the year. As previously reported, this 5-year plan has been informed by current key local, regional and national business recovery plans alongside ongoing feedback from local stakeholders (including the West Norfolk Tourism Forum). The six key strategic aims stated in the plan to assist west Norfolk's post-pandemic tourism business recovery are currently being reviewed for actions across themed Tourism Informal Working Group workshops throughout 2023, such sessions being externally facilitated and attended by officers, members and invited key stakeholders from the local tourism industry. The aim of the series of six workshops being to come to a consensus with regards to targets and actions related to the strategic aims stated within the aforementioned tourism development plan. The final Tourism Informal Working Group is themed 'Experiential and Cultural Tourism' and will be held in mid-October 2023. The Tourism department aims to give a summary of the outcomes from all six of the 2023 Tourism Informal Working Groups series of themed sessions in its March 2024 KL&WN Area Museums report on activity.

4.2 Some other key actions planned by the Tourism Department include:

4.2.1 The Hunstanton Observatory

The construction on the Hunstanton clifftop of the Hunstanton Observatory (externally-funded from the European Regional Development Fund and Interreg, co-ordinated by the NCC EXPERIENCE Norfolk project) was complete in April 2023, with a launch event held on-site that same month alongside a local amateur night-sky photo competition.

As previously reported, it is the department's aim to make west Norfolk a great hub for off-season Dark Skies-type astronomical events in the future, in a bid to further help support an all-year-round tourism economy for the local area. The observatory site is not a community hub but is, instead, funded to become a pre-bookable site by tourism businesses for visitor experiences being held in collaboration with a variety of local groups. A website link dedicated to this observatory site, as well as the first draft of booking information for businesses was launched via the Visit West Norfolk platforms at the same time as the springtime launch event for the site. As the night-sky astronomy season is only at its best from October-March annually, the Tourism department is in ongoing discussions with county Dark Skies Festival leads to help create a calendar of events for the forthcoming

autumn/winter to show both tourism businesses and the general public what is possible at the Hunstanton Observatory site. The site's shelter capacity is admittedly small-scale (a 10-man interior space), to give an intimate experience of the local environment and wide skies, but the department hopes to include as many local tourism businesses as possible as invitees to all Dark Skies events happening at the site to showcase such possibilities for them at the venue. Whilst awaiting the astronomy season to begin in earnest the Tourism department has made their own investments for the observatory interior in recent times, including a selection of large wallcharts for the interior walls (moon map, stars/constellations chart and local wildlife details), a new presenters' plinth and stool and removable visitor benches.

4.2.2 Boosting the Profile of King's Lynn for Group/Tour Operators

As well as conducting digital promotions directed to tour operators, The Tourism department is committed to supporting the King's Lynn Town Guides in their Shared Prosperity Fund awarded plans to attend the March 2024 Travel Trade Show at the Birmingham NEC. The Tourism department plans to continue to meet with the KL Town Guides about this supportive working on a monthly basis leading up to this event. This 2-day trade show provides the opportunity for standholders to have direct face-to-face dialogue with prospective group tour operators and to nurture group and coach trips to King's Lynn with itinerary suggestions and promotional visual material representing the town. The Tourism department is physically attending this event alongside the King's Lynn Town Guides and will aim to support the Town Guides in other related ways leading up to this major tourism trade event. Related to this event, the Tourism department has produced a contacts list of national group and travel trade operator businesses who are already familiar with the wider west Norfolk area, in a possible attempt to further nurture introductions, long-lasting working contacts and future itinerary bookings for the local area with such businesses. The department hopes that several of the invited group business contacts will attend the Travel Trade Show and visit the KL Town Guides exhibition stand for King's Lynn (and wider area) itinerary ideas during the 2-day event.

As a stakeholder member of Visit Norfolk (VN) and Visit East of England (VEE), the Tourism department has supported VEE's plan to travel to the USA this year to promote the local area to overseas group tour operators. During the summer of 2023, VEE's Travel Trade Executive requested promotional content from the west Norfolk Tourism department to help present and promote the west Norfolk area (on this occasion mostly for King's Lynn) amongst other areas of East Anglia) and the VEE officer subsequently attended the Destination Britain North America (DBNA) trade event in San Francisco (a unique opportunity to meet dozens of hand-picked leading US and Canadian travel trade and tour operators) from 7th-10th September 2023. More details about this USA trade event can be found here: <https://rb.gy/5vhj6>

5 **Other developments**

5.1 Partnerships

5.1.1 West Norfolk Tourism continues to work closely with Visit Norfolk and Visit East of England to promote the county and wider area, often including bi-weekly marketing meetings with VEE and its 'DMO Coalition' of members from other areas of the region. As previously reported, this regional coalition continues to utilise an ongoing marketing pot, primarily created from Visit Suffolk and Visit Norfolk funds, to help promote the East of England (including to inbound overseas visitors to the area).

5.1.2 The west Norfolk Tourism department continues to work productively with existing and new partners, including being part in the following groups and partnerships across the period covered by this report (March 2023 - October 2023):

- British Destinations.
- Downham Market Town Council Tourism [periodic meetings restarted from Feb 2023].
- Employer Engagement Network [Norfolk-wide, includes regular *Skills Network* e-shots].
- Film Friendly Norfolk Steering Group.
- Good Journey County Campaign (NCC).
- King's Lynn & Norfolk LCWIP Group.
- King's Lynn Town Centre Public Realm & Repurposing Project Group.
- King's Lynn Walsingham Way Group.
- Norfolk & Suffolk DMO Coalition.
- Norfolk Tourism Best Practice Group.
- Visit Britain [via semi-regular DMO calls].
- Visit Norfolk [Visit West Norfolk/BCKLWN are stakeholder members].
- Visitor Pressures Steering Group [Norfolk coast/AONB focussed].
- West Norfolk Tourism Forum.

6 Resource implications

None.

7 Policy implications

None.

8 Recommendations

The committee is recommended to note the report.

9 Access to Information

No background papers.

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