

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

30th October 2024

Councillor Simon Ring – Deputy Leader and cabinet member for Business and Culture

Culture

I begin this report with culture with the exciting news that work has begun on the Guildhall and Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust (Stratford Upon Avon) Folio Project. 4 locations have been chosen: Stratford Upon Avon, Shakespeare North Playhouse, Alwick Castle and the Guildhall in King's Lynn. Children from a local school will be working with the Birthplace Trust to produce Midsummer Night's Dream at the Guildhall in November. This is the last of the 4 performances of various plays across the country and the culmination of a national project to mark the publication of the children's folio.

This is just part of a continuation of the story unfolding with the Shakespeare connection and the possibilities for marketing are endless.

The total people engaging with Guildhall stories in August was in excess of 80 million this was due to the release of the story about the new (very old) doorway. In September there was still a very respectable 200,000 people engaging with Guildhall stories.

The total footfall for the year to date appears to show that 14.7% of the Borough population have interacted with the Guildhall in the last 12 months which is a huge uplift on the year before.

Planning permission was granted unanimously for the projects RIBA stage 4 plans and the tender for the full works are attracting significant interest.

The highly successful summer exhibition Magic of Middle Earth Exhibition closed having been visited by around 2000.

Lay of the Land opened in two galleries (Shakespeare and Fermoy): an exhibition of 34 of the most high profile contemporary East Anglian Artists opened with the accompanying schools work.

I also attended the opening of Collusions 'Kinema of Dreams', which is being shown in clips at the Majestic Cinema and projected onto the Greyfriars Tower until early November.

More broadly, work continues on the Cultural and Heritage Strategy with a further two workshops which happened in September.

Business

The 2025 Business Awards nominations are now open and we will once again be sponsoring the event and the Business of the Year category.

The Norfolk Economic Strategy has had airings at both R&D and Cabinet. It is still in

its draft stages and members expressed some concerns regarding the lack of exposure that a number of significant West Norfolk industries have been given, including Bircham Newton Construction College, COWA and the School of Nursing, and the wealth of the tourism offerings including the Guildhall's Shakespeare connections and world exposure.

There was a desire by members for our concerns to be reported back to the authors and edits made where possible.

Our own Economic Strategy is in it's advanced stages and we hope that the granular detail that was missing from the Norfolk strategy will be provided by our own.

I had meetings and conversations with a number of potential investors in sites in West Norfolk and am pleased to hear that there is growing interest in the NORA site from potential tenants.

The retail Rail to River pods on Purfleet Street are now available. We currently have a list of 15 businesses who are keen to make use of them. They will be available from one week to 3 months, and it is intended that they are used by businesses who offer something slightly different to what is already available in town. The F&B pods are not yet available, due to delays in connecting services. It is hoped that we will get one of the 15 businesses interested in these in by Christmas. These pods will also be bookable for a minimum of one week but with the set-up costs being higher, we will be allowing them to be occupied for as long as 6 months. It is essential that we turn these pods over, giving everyone a fair chance of their use. There will be a requirement that they be open 5 out of 7 days a week.

I attended the pitches for the 'Love Your Town' grants of £2,000. There were some very good ideas put forward. It was particularly encouraging to see so many from Downham Market, most of which were supported, especially considering the fact that there were none last year.

Leisure

A number of Councillors went on two tours of our leisure site in Lynn, Downham and Hunstanton. Staff presented us with a great deal of information about what AWN delivers and the tour of the facilities opened a lot of eyes to both the importance of these assets to the Health and Wellbeing of West Norfolk residents, but also the very real financial issues facing us with the current physical state of some of the buildings.

We have begun the planning, with a small working group, of the reintroduction of the AWN business within Council control, and I am happy to report the businesslike efficiency being shown in developing the plan. All, at present, is on target for end of this tax year.

At the end of P5 AWN Attendances are up by 4% with good performances across the board but especially community & events. Fitness performed well on the back of the Paris Olympic offer.

There are a range positive projects currently underway both in the community and at AWN sites working with a range of partners.

There are some updates on Projects some which have been halted with the move back to the Council.

There are some significant risks the AWN board should be aware of currently including Downham Market Academy and flood damage at Lynnsport.

There are productive discussions taking place with the council about future operating models for the venues and options for remodelling and reinvesting in the venues.

PERFORMANCE

Cinema

August box office saw the latest Marvel epic *Deadpool & Wolverine* hit our screens. The duo have since gone on to become the highest grossing film of all time. Also doing well in our cinema was the dramatic novel adaptation *It Ends with Us* with Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni, with uplifting animation *Despicable Me 4* making the summer a huge success. Following the summer, September was packed with an eclectic mix of exciting features. Leading the box office this month was the long-awaited sequel to the eccentric eighties classic, *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice*. King's Lynn Middle-aged audiences will not be forgotten this month with true story-inspired *Lee* with Kate Winslet and Alexander Skarsgard and the dark mystery *The Critic* with beloved star Ian McKellen. The Cinema has had a good couple of months with good audience numbers. We had 6 sold out screenings of the Lord of the Rings trilogy shown in collaboration with the Guildhall exhibition, as well as 5 new screening of National Theatre Live *Prima Facie*. The Nov/Dec film slate is looking promising

Theatre

On the other hand, theatre has had a disappointing September. It's still above target but some shows which sell out, have only hit 75% of their projected sales. Comedian Dom Jolly was moved from the Corn Exchange to the Guildhall due to poor sales. However, October & November have great sales and Panto is looking promising, as the sales are the highest they have ever been at this stage. Spring 2025 looks like it will be a record also with many shows already sold out.

Membership, Sales, and Retention

To align with the excitement surrounding the Paris Olympics and Paralympics, AWN introduced a limited-time "Go For Gold" membership promotion from July 1st to September 8th. This offer provides unlimited access to all facilities, including gym, swim, classes, Biocircuit, and the athletics track. Responding to feedback provided from parents to him in Cllr Ben Jones' ward, the offer incorporated Kaset access into the "Go For Gold" junior promotion.

The "Go For Gold" campaign exceeded expectations, surpassing membership targets and generating a total of 756 new memberships, including 381 Gold memberships.

This successful initiative not only increased membership yield but also validated our existing pricing strategies. Additionally, it demonstrated the value and popularity of the Kaset facility among junior members, reinforcing the importance of providing

accessible and engaging fitness options for all ages.

As of September 2024, membership numbers stand at 6,674, representing a 437-member increase compared to July 2023. This ongoing positive trend is reflected in the consistent sales performance, with 1,700 membership agreements sold by September 19th, 2024, a 25% increase from the same period last year. The financial impact of these increased memberships is evident in the monthly direct debit income which is up 12.5% compared to the same period in the previous year.

To further promote physical activity and engage the local community, the Leisure sites participated in National Fitness Day on September 18th. By offering a range of free activities, the event aimed to inspire residents to adopt a more active lifestyle. While the full impact of this initiative is still being evaluated, it is expected to have a positive influence on membership and community engagement.

Attendances

Attendances to the end of P5 are up 4% over the same period the previous year at 620,506. Some headline attendances:

	% Difference to end of P5 vs pre
Theatre	7%
Cinema	-15%
Stories of Lynn	0%
Town Hall	35%
Community	18%
Fitness	9%
Swimming	-1%
Group Ex	-3%
Sports Hall	-7%
3G	-1%
Events	130%
Gymnastics	3%
Football	72%
Kaset	41%
Barn	12%

Areas for focus include the cinema, sports halls and swimming due to budget gap. Sports Hall income is good due to a large rise in events.

Summer Holiday 2024

Another positive summer holiday programme including Big Norfolk Holiday Fun and BCKLWN funded clubs and Summer of Play £1/50p activities saw 16,198 attendances. This included 1503 Big Norfolk Holiday Fun attendances, 1910 Holiday Clubs and 12,114 Summer of Play activities subsidised by the BCKLWN. The support of the BCKLWN and the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) provided 3,413 free meals for children attending holiday clubs. At present, Christmas is due to be

the final HAF funded holiday period despite lobbying nationally there has been indication of an extension or replacement fund yet.

Community

Active Community sessions have seen a large growth over the summer period with attendances up 84% on Aug 23. This has mainly been due to the UKSPF funding enabling the extension of the programme and the range of events delivered over the summer including Town Centre Olympic activities, Hunstanton Beach Sports and Tower Street Games.

Sports Courses

Sports Courses continue to do well marginally up on the same period 2023. Drop off in swimming and tennis has been offset by growth in football and gymnastics.

	Swimming	Gymnastics	Football	Tennis	T
Aug 2023	1789	922	432	100	3
Aug 2024	1624	959	605	79	3
Diff	-9%	4%	40%	-21%	1

Tennis (Junior) – Following the successful delivery of the LTA Youth Start 6-week course in June, we launched another course at the start of this month after the August break. Both age specific sessions were full and extended to accommodate the demand.



LTA Youth start: Racquet, t shirt and sweat bands provided as part of the affordable package in partnership with the LTA

Tennis – (Adults) –The new Intermediate+ session has been a success with all 16 spaces booked! We now have customers on the waiting list and will look to grow the session with potentially adding a second coach.

Swimming lessons have started slower than usual for the September pick up, that

said numbers have still increased following the return to school. We have now moved to teaching in water at stage 1 and 2 in St James after a trial period and customer consultation, as the changes were very well received with perceived quality and progress higher in all participants. With most of our competition in Kings Lynn, this will help us remain competitive with the private swim schools in the area whom all deliver in water teaching.

Football has seen a fantastic return to the new season with 605 players now on direct debit programmes as well as PAYG customers for First Touch, Walking Football, All to Play For and Social Soccer. This represents a 40% increase on the same time last year. Pre-season saw our U9-U14 Elite Teams invited to the Canary Cup at Norwich CSF's Nest. This Cup is an invite only for elite football programmes with our teams facing Norwich City, Aston Villa, Watford, West Brom and Brighton to name a few. As you can imagine this is a difficult competition for us but our U14's did make the final against Brighton but narrowly missed out.

Time to Talk Football Cup took place in August with 16 wellbeing teams from across the country descending on Lynnsport with football, music, magic and fundraising for the 8:56 Foundation.

Gymnastics had a busy summer with 6 competitions, 2 of which we hosted at Lynnsport. Many top placings and wins with a notable performance from one of our tumblers coming 3rd in the National Finals. Over the summer we also had a national coach come and do a Tumbling Camp with our Senior Elite Tumblers which was a great experience for them. Numbers continue to grow all be it at a slower rate.

Climbing Club – The Adult climbing club at Lynnsport hit its capacity for the first time in a few months this week, with 20 climbers in attendance!

PROJECT UPDATES

3G Resurface

Contractors are onsite and working to replace the existing 3G surface. All sessions have been able to be relocated to other areas of the Lynnsport site. Unfortunately, the base is in a poor state of repair, so we have had to agree a further £83k to tarmac the base, bringing the total amount to £413k. We are expecting to reopen the 3G mid-November.

New 3G

This planning application has been withdrawn. We considered that River Lane is not the most appropriate site and a decision was made to conduct a Borough wide site feasibility for up to 4 3G pitches, a call for sites will be part of that study. We met with both the Football Foundation and the Norfolk FA to give them our reasons and work with them going forward.

Padel

Initial feasibility work for the development of Padel in West Norfolk has been followed with meetings with potential developers, operators and investment partners. Partners have been requested to provide short overviews of their interest in the project by the 11 October from which point proposals will be pitched to the council.

Town Hall weddings

We have just completed a new video and photographs for the new wedding brochure.

Corn Exchange

We have started the trial of card payments only at the bar. We have decided to do this as a soft approach with signage saying our “preferred payment is card/contactless”. Although there was an initial backlash on Facebook (this was mainly due to our message being incorrect) we have not received any complaints.

We are working with the Council & BID for the Christmas Light Switch on. We are hiring a Cinderella coach and horses to bring Cinderella to the stage to switch on the lights.

We have just extended our Patronbase box office system contract for another 5 years. We went through procurement & legal to get an exemption from the tender process as Patronbase are already in the framework and were offering us a far better contract of £45K over 5 years.

EDI reassessments and improvements across sites

Downham Leisure Reception social area. Following a visit from Dragons on the move, new tables and chairs have been put in place to encourage a more social / community feel that are accessible to wheelchair bound users. A full EIA assessment on the site will follow this to establish further reasonable adjustments. The same process following the Dragons visit to Lynnsport will also be undertaken. St James changing rooms: Additional beacon alarm lights (visible red beacons) have been installed following feedback from a profoundly deaf user that this would be beneficial. The full EIA assessment on the site also highlighted the need to amend some changing room signage to gender neutral, so that's also been completed. We are in the process of ordering wider access graded steps to the pool too, as currently it's the hoist or steep steps, so this is an easy reasonable adjustment to help with accessibility for those with limited mobility/post partem/obesity.

NEW PROPOSALS AND INVESTMENT

Facility renewal plan

Proposals for investment into a renewal plan for pools and leisure facilities will be presented to Cabinet in December. The plan highlights four priorities with a total capital cost to deliver the long term programme at around £80m. The plan will offer a total of around £1.3m net annual revenue improvement for the council – as well as in excess of 250,000 annual increase in visits - many of which will be new users. The proposed first priority is the replacement of St James pool at Lynnsport, closely followed by the replacement of Oasis in Hunstanton (site tbc).

The report attempts to present a compelling case for the council to invest in facilities renewal, with the twin aims of breaking out of the spiral of decline and escalating costs, combined with synchronising, as far as practicable, the closure of old facilities and their replacement with new.

This is an approach which has tried and tested results in terms of significant reductions in running costs, major increases in usage and income and improved health, social and economic outcomes.

The key to trigger this virtuous circle is to secure upfront capital resources; the report demonstrates that significant elements of this capital can be 'DIY funded' by the

savings on annual running costs released by the new facilities – thereby shifting the council's spend away from ever increasing day-to-day subsidy into investment in a legacy of new high quality, low carbon, high usage, long term assets. A classic 'invest to save' approach with today's subsidy being transformed into tomorrow's investment.

Tourism

West Norfolk Tourism Development Plan - Actions

The Tourism department continues to work on actions directly related to the six strategic aims highlighted within the *West Norfolk Tourism Development Plan 2022-26*. We prepared and presented our progress to borough council members across two *Tourism Informal Working Group* meetings (these meetings held in August and September 2024).

The East Anglia LVEP

Ourselves and Visit East of England, successful in their Summer 2024 application to become a nationally-recognised LVEP (the East Anglia Local Visitor Economy Partnership), arranged an online Q&A session on August 23rd 2024 for officers and members, about what the new LVEP status for the East of England could mean for the area. The Tourism department then attended and contributed to the Visit East of England LVEP Destination Management Plan working group session on 11th September, alongside peer tourism bodies from across East Anglia.

As a Visit East of England partner organisation, the west Norfolk Tourism department attended the Visit East of England & Partners Visitor Economy Conference held on 16th October 2024, with the LVEP status and 'AI tools for the tourism industry' being two main topics of focus throughout the day's conference programme, based in Norwich (which was attended by almost all partners across Norfolk and Suffolk).

Other Partnership Working

Norfolk Coast Protected Landscape

The Tourism department continues to be an active attendee at important workshops recently held by the Norfolk Coast Protected Landscape team. These workshops are intended to help shape and influence the Norfolk Coast Protected Landscape Management Plan, which includes aspects of sustainability, business practices and possible visitor pressures in vulnerable areas of the local environment. The latest workshops we attended were:

Management Plan Workshop: *Nature Recovery Targets* - 10th October.

Management Plan Workshop: *Sustainable Tourism* - 15th October.

Downham Market Town Council

Ourselves, joined by Cllr. Anota, attended the Downham Market Business & Tourism Committee's local business engagement session on 18th September and we gave a presentation to the businesses and organisations in attendance.

The presentation we gave was focussed on identifying between 'quick wins' and 'long-term vision' when it came to forming new projects within the town of Downham Market to boost footfall and trade.

Hanse League

The Tourism department, as Chair of the Sustainable Hanse Working Group, arranged and held a well-attended online event in September dedicated to the sustainable topic of 'Water', with speakers from the following three businesses:

1. Walpole Highway: Tamar Nurseries.

2. Deventer: Room for the River Programme.
3. Beverley & East Riding: Changing Coast East Riding project.

A good deal of climate change officers and environmental leads from across northern Europe attended this Hanse event arranged by ourselves, with another similar event to be arranged in the New Year.

West Norfolk VENI Steering Group

The Tourism department, an active member of this steering group after it was recently granted SPF funding to roll out a programme of business support to the west Norfolk tourism industry is now actively working alongside the VENI project to create multimedia content for the SPF-supported West Norfolk Tourism Ambassadors E-Learning Course. This includes filming and presenting a small range of content for this forthcoming online course.

King's Lynn Walsingham Way Working Group

The Tourism department represented their ongoing work with the King's Lynn Walsingham Way Working Group at the St Olav's Way Conference at Norwich Cathedral on 10th September, gaining insight on getting more national and local support for such a new major (29-mile) trail linking Walsingham to King's Lynn. We also produced and gave a presentation about this new King's Lynn Walsingham Way project to members of the King's Lynn Civic Society on 3rd October 2024.

Tourism Statistics for 2023

The report of the last calendar year of volume and value tourism statistics for west Norfolk was released in September 2024.

This report indicated that more people are coming to visit west Norfolk compared to the year before and, when compared to recent years, they are spending more whilst they are here.

Compared to 2019 there was a major increase of visits to the west Norfolk coastline in 2023.

Print Advertising and Promotions

During the post-summer season each year the Tourism department concentrates on **out-of-season tourism** promotions, as well as marketing to help **boost all-year-round group and coach tours** to the area in the future.

A selection of actions we undertook for this period include:

- **'Who's Who in Group Leisure 2025'** magazine (December 2024 Edition, glossy magazine which goes out to group tour operators) - we created two full-colour half-page paid promos in September for this forthcoming group tour operator magazine, one advert dedicated to *Hunstanton* and the other advert dedicated to *King's Lynn*.
- **'Coach Touring Magazine'** (December 2024 Edition, glossy magazine, which goes out to group tour operators) - we created a full-colour full page paid advertorial for *Hunstanton*, with the aim to help boost group tour bookings for the town.
- **'Norfolk Magazine'** (September 2024 Edition, well-established glossy magazine focussing on the county of Norfolk) - we created a paid full-page advert for *King's Lynn*, the aim being to help encourage out-of-season tourism with the piece.
This mirrors the 'A Love Letter to...King's Lynn' theme of that particular edition of Norfolk Magazine.
- **'The Stir'** (October 2024 Edition, glossy magazine for craft spirits) - we

created a 2-page 'Winter in West Norfolk' illustrated feature as paid advertorial in this magazine to promote out-of-season tourism to affluent demographics.

Other Printed Marketing and Promotions

- **'The Downham Market Gingerbread Trail'** - Following on from its successful mid-summer public launch event in Downham Market (Discover Downham Heritage Centre), a second print of the department's new self-guided town trail title, *The Downham Market Gingerbread Trail* booklet, was necessary in September 2024.
- **'Norfolk Coast Myths & Legends'** - The first full draft of the Tourism department's new 'Norfolk Coast Myths & Legends' booklet was finished on 25th September, for a soft launch at the 'Fear in the Fens' Festival on 25th October, before wider public distribution in early 2025 with a small series of public events linked to the release. This new tourism product primarily celebrates and promotes out-of-season tourism and all-year-round experiences and folklore along our coastline.

Online Promotions

We remain very busy in creating and posting new media and online content as regular promotional elements to support west Norfolk tourism businesses and organisations. We have focussed a good deal of time and resources on capturing new promotional media from the west Norfolk coast and some major rural tourism businesses. We have also engaged with a variety of great Downham Market Town Centre food and drink premises for current social media and future planned print projects aiming to highlight that particular growing aspect of the town's strong tourism offer.

Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

I have had numerous meetings with officers and outside bodies

Officers

Kate Blakemore
Michelle Drewery
Tina Underwood
Lorraine Gore
Debbie Gates
Oliver Judges
Duncan Hall
Martin Chisholm
Jemma Curtis
Tim Fitzhigham
Honor Howell
James Grant
James Arandale
Alexa Baker
Tommy Goode
Lynne Fawkes

Outside bodies

Civic Society
Hunstanton Action Group
Conservancy Board
Town Deal Board
BID
The Garage
Museum Services

I have regular scheduled meetings with most of the above officers and will continue to meet and fact find with outside bodies including those already met with.