

Town
Village
Coast
Heritage
Wildlife
Industry
Culture

West Norfolk Tourism Development Plan 2022-26

Summary Document

The summary of a strategic plan
for local tourism and hospitality



Introduction

The west Norfolk tourism industry has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. The **overall value of tourism income for west Norfolk fell -56% in 2020** and **the total amount of visitors to west Norfolk fell around -57%** for that same year, both in comparison to 2019 figures. If we take the overall volume of west Norfolk jobs supported by the local tourism industry, **we see local tourism-based jobs in decline by -36% for 2020** in comparison to pre-pandemic 2019. It remains to be seen how (or if) tourism income in 2021-22 has improved within the west Norfolk area in comparison to the first year of the pandemic.

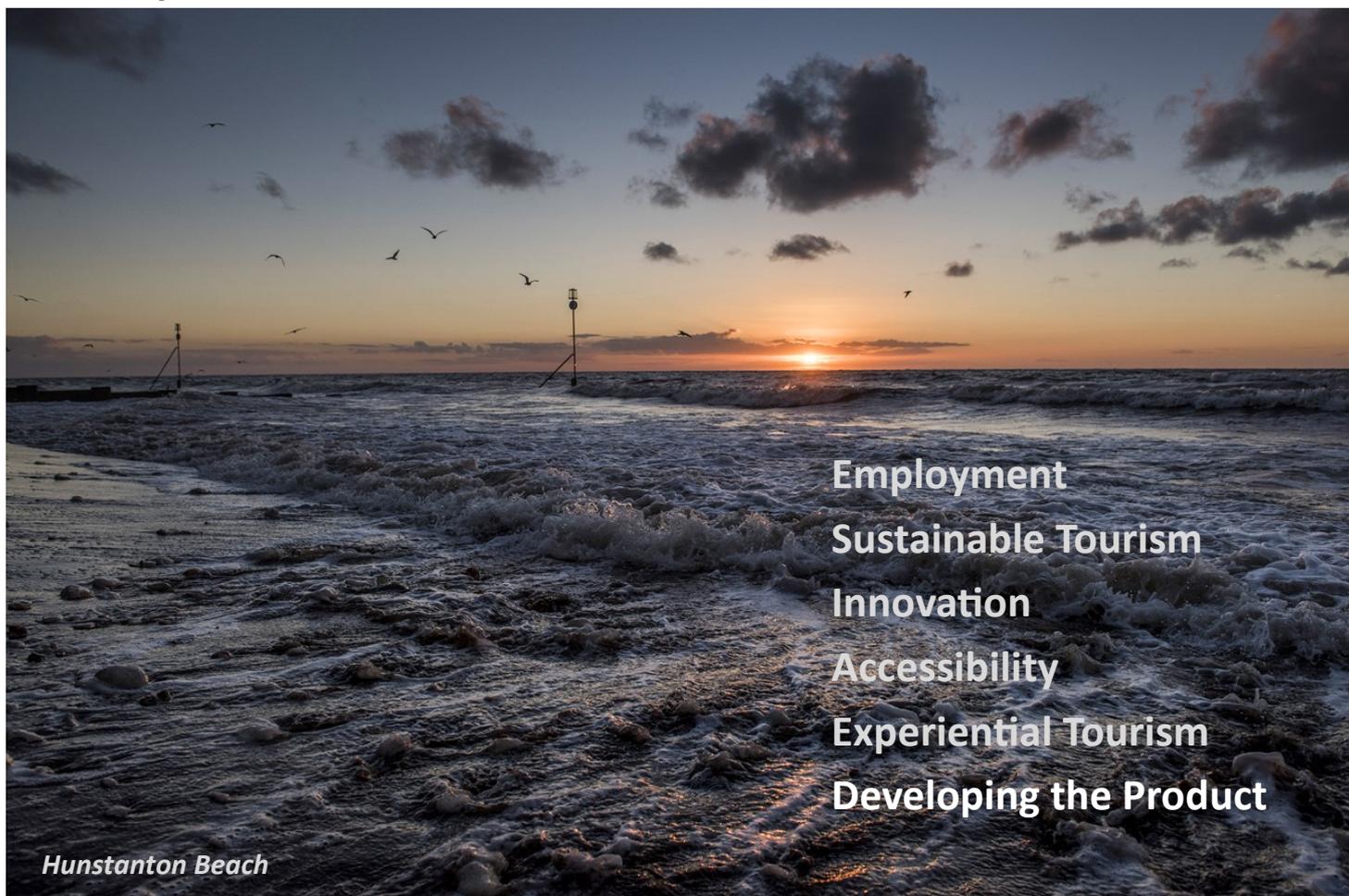
From a west Norfolk level, a combination of the local tourism income figures already received and regular feedback from the area's tourism businesses through completed tourism business surveys and B2B liaison with the Tourism department indicates that there are several major negative impacts that will continue to hinder the speed of recovery for west Norfolk tourism if not addressed as soon as possible. It is a combination of these *local* negative impacts and major reported issues affecting the *national* tourism industry which influence the six key strategic aims stated within this *West Norfolk Tourism Development Plan 2022-26*.

The Tourism Department

The Tourism department of the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk is probably best known as its visitor-facing brand name of 'Visit West Norfolk'. It is a longstanding local area Destination Management Organisation (DMO) that is a place marketing and visitor promotions team staffed by two full-time officers (a Senior Tourism Officer and Tourism Support Officer).

Alongside visitor-facing marketing and tourism promotions the team are also connected to place enhancement projects and, being part of the Regeneration and Economic Development directorate within the local authority, can be involved in regeneration projects around the west Norfolk area in a variety of ways to help reinforce the fact that west Norfolk is a superb place to visit, live and work in.

Visit West Norfolk does not operate local public-facing tourism enquiry services such as a Tourist Information Centre or Tourist Information Point (such services currently supplied by Alive West Norfolk at two of their venues). Instead, the VWN team possess and utilise an extensive portfolio of digital information platforms and printed tourism literature, all used for a whole variety of ongoing, seasonal and one-off west Norfolk tourism campaigns to attract national and international visitors to the area. An internal audit of the Tourism department was conducted from 2020-21. The review noted the increasing audience numbers that the department's digital platforms reach.



Employment
Sustainable Tourism
Innovation
Accessibility
Experiential Tourism
Developing the Product

Hunstanton Beach

Six strategic aims

The six following strategic aims have been driven by a combination of local tourism income figures, findings from tourism business surveys and general feedback from west Norfolk-based tourism businesses since the first UK lockdown of March 2020. These aims have subsequently been reviewed by the West Norfolk Tourism Forum Executive Committee. Finally, an interactive workshop was conducted with tourism businesses at the West Norfolk Tourism Forum AGM event, held in November 2021.

Supporting comments and notations from existing tourism and regeneration plans (from both a local and national level) are also woven into these six core strategic aims, as noted within the section of each applicable aim.

A multitude of other elements within the modern tourism industry landscape are covered by these six strategic aims. For example, the impact on climate change and wildlife by tourism in west Norfolk is linked to the strategic aim for **Sustainable Tourism**. Similarly, 4G/5G signal quality within west Norfolk (so important for visitor access to tourism information) is linked to the plan's strategic aim for **Innovation & Digitisation**. The strategic aim for **Employment** in the local tourism industry includes other aspects such as training support, skills and even public transport mobility needs of hospitality staff in the local area.

#westnorfolktourism



1: Impacts on employment within the tourism sector

One of the key strategic aims for the west Norfolk Tourism department is a focus on supporting local business recovery from the impacts on employment within west Norfolk's tourism industry. Such negative impacts on employment, as widely reported on a nationwide basis in recent times, may not wholly be the fallout from the pandemic itself. Nonetheless, such impacts on employment arguably impedes the ability for (and speed of) tourism recovery in the local area.

There should be the strategic aim to **focus on skills and local workforce support**. Utilising active partnerships with leaders and key stakeholders of the west Norfolk tourism industry, the Tourism department could actively help to **promote the many positive elements of working in the area's tourism and hospitality sectors**. Such promotions could explore employment opportunities, training and skills support, tourism industry-based apprenticeships and related opportunities within the voluntary sector at the same time as addressing potential visitors to the area.

Based on feedback received from some local tourism contacts in recent times, there also needs to be an active sharing of information on how best to *retain* staff and volunteers.

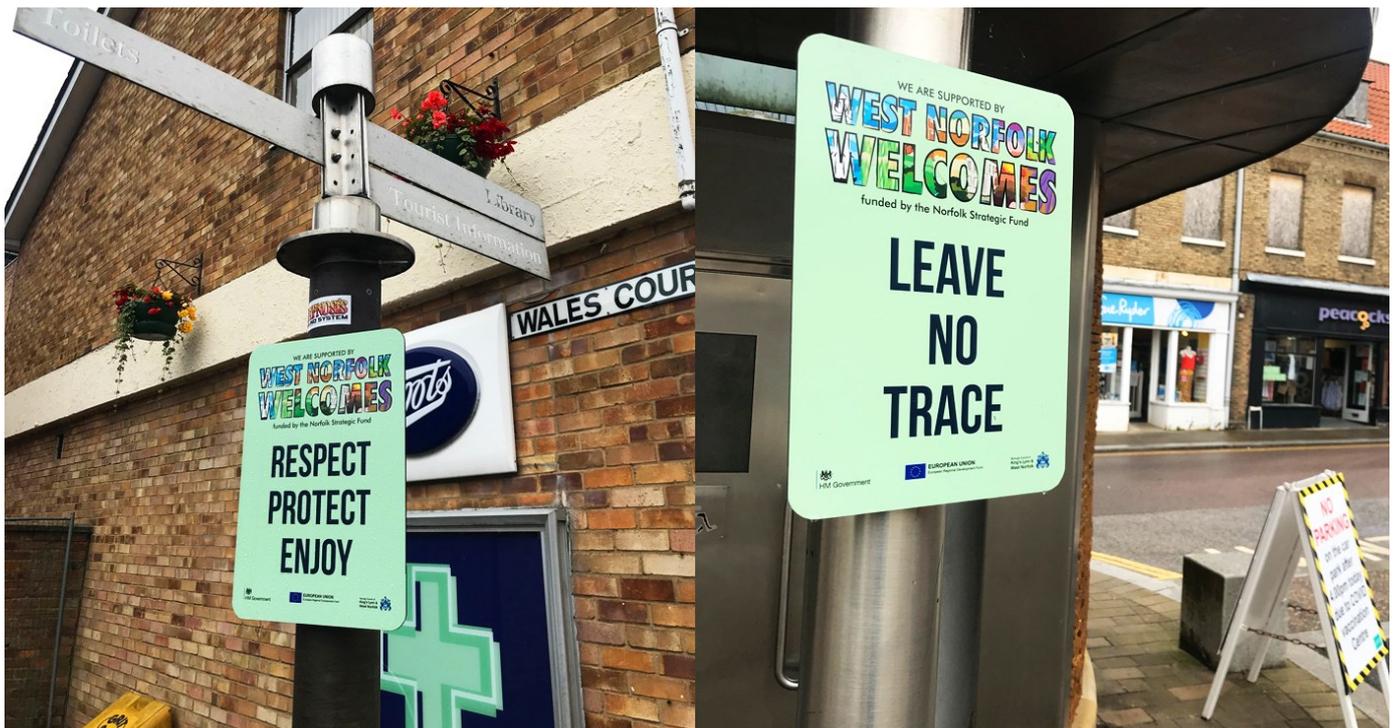
2: 'Sustainable Tourism' and the natural environment

"Economic growth must go hand-in-hand with greater protection for our natural landscapes, our forests, beaches, clean air, and areas of outstanding beauty rich in biodiversity." East of England Destination Development Prospectus '21.

Visit West Norfolk has been working with such local environmental groups as Norfolk Coast Partnership's 'Reopening the Coast' group since the early months of the pandemic, **helping to identify and report any known negative impact on the west Norfolk environment from visitors** to the area - particularly the impact from the phenomenon of the 'New Traveller' (first-time staycationers and visitors to rural and coastal west Norfolk). From mid-2020 onwards the Tourism department has been encouraging **responsible tourism** and **informed travel** which can positively contribute to the local economy, connected local supply chains and the environment.

The Tourism department identifies **the importance of minimising any risk of over-tourism** as part of the Borough Council's duty to protect its natural resources and cultural heritage. West Norfolk has a varied and rich landscape with areas which are highly ecologically vulnerable, but key solutions to tourist flow-through management throughout the area could include a combined approach of **promoting all-season tourism**, wider-reaching **responsible tourism messaging**, supporting **parish council visitor development plans**, and attempts at **spreading tourist demand across the west Norfolk geography** (where appropriate) to help minimise hotspots and footfall bottlenecks in the future.

Alongside Visit East of England, the Tourism department will align itself with the Government's 2021 Sustainable Tourism Plan and the aims of the BCKLWN Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.



#westnorfolktourism

'Responsible Tourism' signage in Downham Market



3: Innovation and digitisation

Utilising future public realm improvements and modernisation, the King's Lynn Town Investment Plan, possible 4G/5G improvements, promotion of tech support workshops and related tech grant information for local businesses (amongst other elements), **west Norfolk cannot stay still if its local tourism industry wishes to meet the demands of the modern visitor.**

In amongst many current promotional and digital marketing trends, Visit West Norfolk identifies a need to increase social interaction with visitors for User Generated Content (the UGC trend) and to more effectively capture authentic interest in the west Norfolk area. This aim could include the use of immensely popular platforms such as Crowdriff and Tiktok alongside mid-level social influencers in a fresh approach on how digital promotions and online messaging are transmitted and received.

In adapting to the needs of modern audiences, Visit West Norfolk also **aims to conduct innovative and stand-out grassroots promotional concepts** utilising sound and ambient visuals, particularly for capturing interest from Gen Z (up to age 25) and affluent millennial (age 26-41) demographics. It is believed by some online tourism reports that these two demographics are arguably the key markets for growth in post-pandemic (and post-Facebook) times - at least when it comes to positive engagement with less traditional tourism digital marketing methods.

#westnorfolktourism

4: Visitor accessibility

“An inclusive and accessible tourism offer that meets customer needs is good for both businesses and consumers. Before COVID-19, half a million British adults cited ‘lack of accessibility provision’ as the reason they did not take a domestic trip in the previous 12 months.” The DCMS Tourism Recovery Plan 2021.

Although this strategic aim does identify the need to Improve travel and tourism information for visitors with varied physical requirements, there is also an identified **need to focus on making west Norfolk more accessible for visitors** in other important ways too, from linking up existing pathways and physical routes to making improvements to public signage (both digital and traditional displays) and interpretation boards across all three west Norfolk towns, the strategic aim for improving visitor accessibility within the area is arguably a broad but necessary one.

Work is already underway by the Visit West Norfolk team to **actively engage with current projects that approach this aim for improved visitor accessibility in different ways**. From the Norfolk Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to future expansions of the Norfolk Coast Path, and from newly-formed local community groups who aim to improve and expand upon historic trails of visitor appeal in the area to overseeing various interpretation board replacements within the local area, the Tourism department sees such improvements and developments as an important element of modernising the area and encouraging economic growth, to help meet the many requirements and expectations of the modern traveller.





Castle Rising

5: Experiential Tourism - bookable experiences

Visit West Norfolk believes that out-of-season tourism is no longer a choice but a way forward for the west Norfolk tourism industry to begin to recover. There is ample contemporary evidence across the industry, from recent Visit-Britain consumer surveys to national investment in the EXPERIENCE programme, emphasising the need for tourism businesses to adapt their offers, balance changes in consumer demand, and enhance their offered visitor experiences to continue to attract much-needed income across the calendar year.

Different seasons may well mean **different markets to attract**, and visitors do want to engage with our tourism business offering with all of their senses. The **growing industry trend for such Experiential Tourism can be a key driver for low season income**, though we also need to recognise that west Norfolk has a **truly fantastic out-of-season offer ready for more focus**, more marketing and more promotional opportunities. A traditional single-focus on an annual summer campaign is no longer an adequate approach for our local tourism offer. With the aim of a more efficient tourism business recovery process in mind, **the local tourism industry really needs to create new (or build upon existing) high quality bookable visitor experiences** which are superb no matter what the weather may be. West Norfolk's tourism offer needs to be as strong and enticing during cold, wet and dark times of the year as it surely is during the summer season.

Through local collaboration, innovative visitor experiences do not have to be tech-based nor specifically cater to contemporary tourism trends. There is scope to build upon a traditional sense of place and retro aesthetics, remembrance and an appeal to an unspoilt sense of nostalgia whilst still offering a high quality experience with modern resources. Any such marketing approach can include modern interpretations of storytelling and user-generated content (UGC).

Though Visit West Norfolk recognises that the creation of new experiences can require a lot of development, if they are innovative and communicated well, visitors can do much of the work and share your experiences for you.

#westnorfolktourism

6: Developing the cultural product

Developing the cultural offer within west Norfolk's three towns at the same time as nurturing diverse creative and cultural opportunities across the area is vital to keep the area relevant and competitive within the UK's modern tourism sector, ultimately contributing to the area's strong appeal to (and hopefully surpassing the expectations of) modern visitors and their families across a range of social, economic and cultural demographics.

This fact has already been recognised by the borough. For example, the King's Lynn Town Investment Plan (TIP) developed from 2020-21 sets out a strategic plan to address the opportunities and challenges that face the town in a changing world through 5 priorities for investment. The mission set out in the King's Lynn Town Investment Plan includes;

“A repurposed town centre with new experiences and businesses; increasing footfall, enhancing cultural opportunities, with its different parts better connected.”

This mission and other similar objectives across the west Norfolk area can be supported by the Tourism department in several ways, not least within its existing support for the Guildhall Complex & Creative Hub (looking to provide training and workspaces for creative industries), its ongoing work as a member of the Downham Market Town Team (or any future version of that group) and future support within any coastal communities work - whether within Hunstanton or across the west Norfolk coastline.



West Norfolk: a 'must visit' destination

West Norfolk is in the enviable position of having almost the full range of geographical identifiers for tourists with a variety of tastes, all within one fairly accessible contained area: from unspoilt rural villages to coastal hotspots for leisure sailing, historic market towns to authentic seaside resort family experiences, and from wildlife attractions to classic English pubs and trails, **the diversity of the area already holds great potential in expanding the traditional visitor "season" into an all-year-round 'must visit' destination for promotion.** This is why the Tourism department is, probably for the first real time, not merely concentrating a big promotional 'push' for the annual summer season, but now involved in the creation of a full and active, year-round interlinked promotional plan for the whole of 2022 (and then onwards, for each calendar year beyond that).

Even when minimising the traditional bias towards summer season-led marketing and promotions it is still important to monitor and take advantage of all current tourism industry trends which could be applicable to the area at all given times: **mindfulness, perceived sanctuaries for mental health and well-being getaways in the wild, hands-on experiential offerings, the increased linking up of cross-county pathways, building upon a strong alternative transport offer and User Generated Content** all have vital roles to play in making west Norfolk a whole-year 'must visit' destination in the post-pandemic era. Indeed, it is the overall purpose of the development plan to support and highlight such different facets and tools within the local tourism industry, ultimately to help west Norfolk develop and grow ever stronger as a modern 'must visit' destination.

A summary of the strategic development plan for local tourism and hospitality

Visit West Norfolk
Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk
King's Court
Chapel Street
King's Lynn PE30 1EX

