

Cabinet Members Report to Council

21st March 2024

Councillor Simon Ring - cabinet member for tourism, events and marketing

12th Feb to 12th March 2024

Leisure

There is a deep dive into the running of Alive West Norfolk and whether the facilities should continue to be run through the wholly owned subsidiary, be brought back in to Council running in part or whole, and/or make use of a charitable structure form some or all of it. This conversation has been ongoing since day one of this administration and will hopefully come to Cabinet shortly.

The financial position of AWN continues to be challenging. Despite some misinformed opinion, apart from the covid grants period, AWN in any of its historic forms has never paid the Borough Council the service fee budgeted for and has always been a cost to the council. I prefer to call it a spend as the health and wellbeing of our residents, particularly in the areas most affected by deprivation, is a moral obligation to do something about.

The following is a brief extract from the report recently made to the Board

“At the end of Q3 AWN has an operating deficit of £191k, £249k behind budget. Income is performing well at £341k above budget largely due to Theatre, grants, and sports course performance. The deficit can be attributed to delaying the implementation of fees and charges, cost of living payments, budget gaps reported by the accountant in September and some sport income lines not achieving target. Attendances are up by 30k to the end of January at 1.2m with good performances notably at the theatre, cinema, community sessions, and fitness.”

As is clear from this part of the Executive Summary, the impact of the interference on setting fees and charges last year has had a significant hit on the finances despite another year of very encouraging attendance figures.

There are also many challenges from a capital cost point of view that are being, and will continue to be addressed. I won't list them here but suffice to say that there are major costs on the horizon which will need addressing. Some, such as the work to the Gymnastics area, will be carried out asap as there is a valuable income lost if the works are not done, some will be scheduled in on a longer term basis.

Meanwhile, AWN have commissioned an independent benchmarking exercise looking at the performance of the leisure venues in comparison with other similar venues across the UK. A full report will be presented to the Board in due course, but the early main headline so far is (as expected) that the venues perform relatively well on income and customer satisfaction but require above average subsidy as a result of high costs.

AWN have secured, through Active Norfolk, £132k of funding for the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) delivery for 2024 covering activities in Hunstanton, Kings Lynn, South Lynn and Downham Market. The £150k request to the BCKLWN will cover the activities that HAF does not cover, subsidising holiday clubs for those that do not qualify for HAF, provide meals for all and £1/50p activities including swimming during all holiday periods. It is estimated the council may save £10k-£20k on this figure depending on attendances.

Sport England announced £250m in the latest round of Place Expansion. King's Lynn and West Norfolk are in the first round of eligibility and work is currently underway to develop a plan with key stakeholders for West Norfolk. AWN are well positioned to support this work and will be represented on the initial Place Based Board to work up formal proposals. Stakeholder meetings are taking place in March with research ongoing to develop a plan for April. Early indications are that focus areas will include children and young people, tackling health inequalities, inactive older people, those in isolation and deprivation. The council will be represented on the stakeholder group to agree priorities.

This really does highlight the challenges that the team at AWN are facing up to in our Borough with great enthusiasm.

Culture

Capital work on the Guildhall project moving forward. Business plan review consultants commissioned.

Cultural and Heritage Strategy interviews are happening on 20th March. This is an extremely positive step forward for the Council as this is funded by the Arts Council England (ACE) and the presence of a Cultural Strategy is quite understandably a pre-requisite to any significant funding from them and other funders, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The lack of a strategy was stated as a significant reason why the Guildhall bid failed. Whilst this has put the Guildhall project on a backfoot right from the start, the horizon is beginning to look a lot brighter.

21 schools are now engaged in Guildhall project activities.

New Art Club is completely full (happens every other Saturday).

New youth drama club now up and running on Tuesday evenings in association with the KL Players.

Highest visitor numbers for a January since we began keeping records (double last year).

Over 20K visitors to the Guildhall in 2023 this is over double the year before.

Tim Fitzhigham attended the Shakespeare Folger Library in Washington DC and met with the Director Dr Michael Witmore and had a very productive discussion. Tim and I are off to Ipswich for the Norfolk and Suffolk Culture Board Briefing Event on Friday 15th.

A great deal of work has been carried out by me and officers behind the scenes with cultural and heritage groups, and with some exciting projects now getting well and truly started through the Town Deal Board, we are starting to see a great future for the Heritage and Culture of this borough working with many wonderful volunteers.

Two examples of this are the restoration and rejuvenation of the Friends of the Walks and the Hanseatic Festival. Myself, Cllr Rust and Cllr Heneghan were present at the first meeting to restore the Friends of the Walks and I chaired the first new meeting of the Hanseatic Festival. My emphasis was for these two organisations to be run entirely by volunteers but supported by the Borough Council. That is the model that I believe is sustainable for volunteer groups and festivals. The Hansa Festival planning is well under way for a small celebration this year on 16th June and planning for a larger event for the 20th anniversary next year. I am very grateful to all of the volunteers that have shown the enthusiasm to get these things going again, and of course all of those wonderful volunteers that keep this sector so lively in the Borough.

Tourism and Marketing

Visit West Norfolk - An Update for 17/01/24 - 12/03/2024:

Departmental activities for the 'winter to early spring' period of time.

Digital Promotions

During this period of time we have sent out the following e-shots to our visitor contacts:

- Dog Friendly West Norfolk [sent 18/01/2024]
- Valentine's Day in West Norfolk [sent 30/01/2024]
- What's On this February Half Term in West Norfolk 2024 [sent 14/02/2024]
- Mother's Day in West Norfolk 2024 [sent 29/02/2024]

During this period of time we have sent out the following e-shots to our tourism business contacts:

- Training Grants, Workshops and Business Awards [sent 26/01/2024]
- National Apprenticeship Week and Festival of Knowledge Event [sent 08/02/2024]
- You are invited to the West Norfolk Tourism Summit 2024 [sent 14/02/2024]

We uploaded the following new content on the *Visit West Norfolk* website during this time too:

- Celebrate Valentine's Day in West Norfolk 2024 [published 26/01/2024]
- Mother's Day in West Norfolk 2024 [published 12/02/2024]
- Springtime in West Norfolk – a summary including a highlight of the forthcoming *West Norfolk Seasonal Food Festival* [published 11/03/24]

We also created and uploaded the following social media posts during this time:

- o **Social media posts about our blogs:**
 - February Half-Term Activities in West Norfolk 2024
 - Wintertime in West Norfolk
 - West Norfolk... Naturally

- Mark your calendars! Unique events in West Norfolk 2024
- Celebrate Valentine's Day in West Norfolk 2024
- Free Things To Do in West Norfolk – Winter 2024
- Dog Friendly West Norfolk
- Arts and Crafts in West Norfolk
- Mother's Day in West Norfolk 2024
- **Social media posts about local events:**
 - WWT Welney Winter Swan Feeds
 - Love West Norfolk Day
 - West Norfolk Seasonal Food Festival (a series of posts)
- **Social media posts about general tourism themes and venues:**
 - King's Lynn Minster
 - Walking Trails
 - Accommodation
 - Holiday inspiration
 - Norfolk Coast
 - Brancaster
 - Attractions
 - World Wetlands Day
 - Burnham Overy Staithe
 - Drove Orchards
 - Villages
 - Shopping
 - Events
 - Business: Submit Your Event
 - Maritime King's Lynn
 - History and heritage sites
 - King's Lynn architecture

We continue to upload events to the Visit West Norfolk website event listings.

Personnel

One full-time member from the Tourism department team of two has now formally left the authority for exciting opportunities elsewhere in the region. A temporary 6-month post is currently advertised as a replacement for that role in the department, with the deadline for applicants being Thursday 21st March 2024.

New Projects

West Norfolk Tourism Business Summit Event '24

The Senior Tourism Officer was the organiser of the Wednesday March 6th *West Norfolk Tourism Business Summit* evening event, presented on the evening by the independent business-led West Norfolk Tourism Forum and held in the Guildhall of St George, King's Lynn.

Registered attendees of this business support event included:

- Abacus Hotels
- Bircham Windmill

- Christine Pike - Artist
- Church Farm Barns Disabled-Friendly Cottages (Promotions)
- College of West Anglia
- Creake Abbey
- Culture Babylon
- Deepdale Camping
- Downham Market Town Council
- Florence Cottage
- Fountain Partnership
- King's Lynn Civic Society
- King's Lynn Town Guides
- KL 1 Radio
- Larking Gowen
- Manor Farm Business Park (Coates Bros Ltd)
- Metro Dynamics
- New Anglia Growth Hub
- Norfolk Arena
- Prontaprint
- RSPB Snettisham
- RSPB Titchwell Marsh
- Searles Leisure Resort
- Searles Sea Tours
- St Jude's B&B Dersingham
- Tammy Mallett – Businesswoman
- Visit North Norfolk
- Visit West Norfolk
- Watatunga Safari and Wildlife Reserve
- Whatahoot Distillery

Lots of positive feedback was received from attendees about the event and the four business-oriented presenters, with the hope that this event marks the first of what could be an annual major tourism business support event.

The Tourism & Travel Show 2024 – Birmingham NEC

The Senior Tourism Officer has continued to support various practical elements for the forthcoming King's Lynn Town Guides 2-day trade stand appearance at the leading national Tourism & Travel Show at the Birmingham NEC (This KL Town Guides project being supported by SPF funding). Trade stands at this event aims to attract coach and tour guide businesses to their respective localities. The KL Town Guides aims to attract more coach and group tour companies to King's Lynn as a main destination and itinerary for their guests.

The tourism officer will be attending the 2-day event too, on 20th and 21st of March (www.tourismshow.co.uk).

Other Shared Prosperity Fund Projects

We are doing ongoing work on a set of SPF funded projects, which include regeneration of items at the West Lynn Pavilion, enhancements to certain Downham Market Town Centre public realm assets, and the formation of a Hunstanton Observatory events programme for a series of four events of varied themes. The West Lynn Pavilion Waiting Room redecoration and minor repairs to the room have now been completed, and there is ongoing work with the Norfolk Museums Services in adding brand new heritage items to the walls of the room, as well as similar information for the three exterior interpretation boards nearby. A draft

orientation/interpretation board for an area of Downham Market has also now been completed, with an installation scheduled in the near future.

Software

As previously reported, we have been using the User Generated Content Platform Snapsea (www.snapsea.io) through our Instagram account to enhance, inform and grow our future promotional interactions with potential visitors to west Norfolk by utilising high quality authentic visitor content of the local area. We are now 3 months into our subscription and have built up a modest collection of user-generated content, which has subsequently been posted across Visit West Norfolk's social media pages.

The Hanse League

Previously being the Vice Chair, The tourism department has now taken on the Chair and administrator roles for the Europe-wide Modern Hanse League group called the *Hanse Sustainable Working Group*. Our second meeting with the group, and an 'online event' series of presentations, is currently being worked on, focussing on shared best practice and learning on a Europe-wide basis regarding the growth and adoption of sustainable business practices. The Tourism department is now also a member of both the KL Hanse Club and the KL Hanse Festival Committee.

Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

I have had numerous meetings with officers and outside bodies

Officers

Oliver Judges
Duncan Hall
Martin Chisholm
Philip Eke
Bethany O'Brien
Philip Bayfield
Jemma Curtis
Tim Fitzhigham
Honor Howell
Jane Hamilton

Outside bodies

Civic Society
Town Guides
Festival
Hunstanton Action Group
Old Lenensians
Norfolk Records Committee

Norfolk Museums Committee
Friends of the Walks
Kings Lynn Museum
Stories of Lynn and Archives
Conservancy Board
Downham Market Town Council Committee
Lord Lieutenant Lady Dannatt

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.