



Suffolk Growth Partnership workshop: Recovery, restart and renewal for the Visitor Economy

Workshop summary report: 26th March 2021

Overview

Suffolk Growth Partnership (SG) facilitated a workshop focused with public sector and visitor economy stakeholders to develop the sector strategy and activity for recovery, restart and renewal. The session tested the developing strategic priorities for the Suffolk Visitor Economy and how this will contribute to the developing Tourism Action Plan/Destination Plan for the East of England, as a preparation for a Tourism Zone proposal.

This paper provides a summary of the workshop feedback and presents a short-term “next steps” plan to be led by Suffolk Growth with local authorities and key stakeholders, including Visit East of England. Suffolk Growth will also use the workshop outputs to develop and inform future work programmes for the visitor economy. A full list of attendees can be found at the end of this report.

Session summaries

Presentations from the workshop are available as a PDF and has been appended to this note.

The workshop format was:

- **Opening presentation:** Richard Hunt, Strategic Lead for the Visitor Economy, Suffolk Growth Partnership. This introductory presentation set the scene for Suffolk’s Visitor Economy recovery challenges post COVID, and the ambition, priorities and potential workstreams among stakeholders developing to take the sector forward and grow sustainably.
- **Mentimeter survey** question testing the importance of Suffolk’s Visitor Economy Priorities (see below table 1)
- **Plenary presentation** and Q and A: Pete Waters, Executive Director, Visit East of England. This presentation highlighted the successful collaborations and activity, including business surveys, across Suffolk and Norfolk over the past 18 months to meet the historic challenges of the sector in the East including its relationship with Visit England. Successful collaboration has seen extended funded campaigns supported by Visit England and the ambitions and plans for a Tourism Action Plan and Tourism Zone proposal take outline shape. The timetable is to draft the initial plan for May/ June ready for forthcoming announcements from the DCMS Tourism Recovery Plan this summer.
- **Mini Case study presentation-** Three place-based examples of developing plans and initiatives were shared that will support and enable growth of the local and regional visitor economy. These included key programmes from the Ipswich Borough Council Town Fund (including “15 minute

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connected town” plans, regeneration plans, and digital project to regenerate the town centre as a visitor experience. From Felixstowe, the regeneration of leisure and seafront café/restaurant, plans for heritage and the Martello Tower, and the Beach Village. From Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils, an array of projects linking key market towns were embedding the visitor economy in vision plans, including through the Virtual High Street, developing festivals, and cultural partnerships.

Breakout session groups: The mini case studies were built on within breakout group discussions with groups asked to share key areas of learning that can enable a stronger visitor economy, and opportunities to enable the sector to be more resilient, sustainable, innovative and accessible and inclusive. Feedback is summarised in table 2 below.

Table 1: Mentimeter questions and feedback

Question	Feedback
<p>Our strategic ambition is to “drive forward a sustainable visitor economy, maximising its potential, growing in value and productivity, and contributing to our economic and inclusive growth objectives.” Looking at our strategic priorities how would you rate their importance to achieving this ambition in the next 3-5 years?</p>	<p>Average scores provided (1-not important at all – 10-most important Priorities)</p> <p>Developing sector leadership, collaboration and connectivity – 8.3</p> <p>Developing our product – great places and experiences – 8.6</p> <p>Raising ambitions for sector skills, careers, training & development – 8.0</p> <p>Enabling sustainable sector growth, planning for a carbon neutral visitor economy – 8.1</p> <p>Raising the profile – a “Top of Mind” destination – 9.0</p>

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<p>What research or evidence base do we need to underpin the sector’s development, and support our strategic framework and Tourism zone proposals?</p>	<p>Generic areas: Capturing the wider economic and community value of the visitor economy; Defining what the Visitor Economy consists of – breakdown of sub sector value; Review existing organisational information to support analysis of gaps in knowledge; Create a comprehensive digest and open resource for information</p> <p>Consumer/Visitor focus: In depth consumer perception study and market segmentation to support our marketing and promotion; Post-COVID behaviour changes that will impact on the visitor economy.</p> <p>Skills: Perceptions of sector among young people as a future career path (impacted by COVID?). Consider the promotion of the Youth Pledge</p> <p>Brand and identity: Perception - what is the East of England” as a destination / our identity– to help define the region within the Tourism Zone bid cf Cornwall and Yorkshire; Perception of how you reach the East of England</p> <p>Business: Completion of business database; B2B sentiment tracker – are businesses feeling supported and connected?; Business engagement relating to our plans -gather feedback and case studies (to support bid promotion); Digital skills audit of businesses, capability and needs.</p> <p>Carbon neutral ambition: Evidencing the value of a greener/carbon neutral visitor economy; How does the VE currently rate in terms of our carbon neutral ambition , as a sector? How will our TZ proposals impact on this?. Value of active travel – visitor expectations/ requirements for environmentally friendly offer tested?; Opportunities to develop thinking around active travel to as well as within “places” – and the last mile.</p>
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Table 2: A summary of the key issues from the breakout groups is given below.

<p>Challenges and opportunities:</p> <p>Collaboration COVID has prompted some effective collaborative work- we must hold on to it and “work” it with renewed efforts to work in partnership. There is a diversity of offer and assets across the county so there isn’t a one size fits all but we can focus on areas of commonality to develop our strengths. Diversity of destinations in Suffolk require tailored approaches; identifying and celebrating our differences and commonalities. Learning from success and failures in our neighbours and from other parts of the country – what is the set up in Cornwall in terms of DMOs and LAs for example. Learning to be had as regeneration projects begin to develop; potential to extend initiatives into other areas county</p> <p>Place and product development</p>

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Making the Visitor Economy case for investment in new products and transformational projects (like shown in the Felixstowe presentation).

Rethinking the Suffolk visitor economy product and **enhancing the experience** and new facilities to increase visitor spend.

Invest in **non-honeypots locations** to move people away from the traditional Aldeburgh, or Southwold.

Levelling up - is there a case for supporting areas that cannot access the traditional routes of funding but that are still important in the visitor economy e.g. smaller market and coastal towns

More collaboration of VE with town regeneration developments.

Improved communication beyond public sector on potential of developing projects. Need to **share our creative new thinking, sharing of ideas.**

Be consistent in messaging and promotion

Keep up the profile of the importance of the VE with key stakeholders – not just the economic value but to our communities and welfare. A hugely valuable sector to the region

Marketing nationally – Distinguish the Suffolk story - a focus on **how we tell our unique story**; branding opportunities and maximisation; playing to our strengths; promotion of specific destinations & enhance the **understanding of our assets to effectively work them.**

Be vocal through local & national media -Use Unexplored England to stand out

There are particular opportunities for Suffolk for the great outdoor lifestyle.

First impressions – signage (refresh!) and proliferation of litter.

Working across LA/ area boundaries for promotion is key – a visitor doesn't see local authority boundaries. A confusing landscape for a visitor when searching online for local information with too many platforms and mixed marketing.

Connectivity

COVID has forced many businesses to become more digitally accessible; develop and build on this new baseline

Building county-wide bookability – prebooked experience

Unsure about VR/AR technology! How can this be used intelligently to increase visits and spend?

Building the digital connectivity for the VE -a better online presence for businesses – upskilling them is vital

Connecting our places... opportunities to “join” up market town destinations.

There are lots of organisations and partnerships doing a great job on place based initiatives – there is a need for more joined up working, collaboration and communication.

Work more closely with our town councils

Carbon net zero ambitions

When something is built new, make sure it is maximised. Extending the season is good for sustainability.

Lack of green travel options within county – how do we give information in a simple way / in one place

Bike hire / e-scooters – learn from others experience, e.g. Gt Yarmouth – ALSO INNOVATION. This needs to be a consistent approach across Suffolk
Increasing number of hire-bike opportunities for visitors; reducing reliance on cars (currently 80% of visitors come by car)
Businesses/organisations across the county sharing best-practice and their green initiatives

Simplify the message for businesses in how they can engage and why?

Introduce a standard Charter sign up movement. Should we have a Suffolk pledge to get businesses to be carbon net zero by XXXXXXXX date? But will businesses need an incentive to sign up, re-educate them?

Importance of sustainability & accessibility; support from the transport sector to enable accessibility

Role of VE with the local community tourism & having a digital footprint and how easy is it to plan a 'full trip'. How easy is the last mile?

Pursue active travel opportunities and good practice- including e bikes

What are initiatives like Greenest County, Active Suffolk, Suffolk Climate Emergency Plans, Transport East doing and are they being shared across all LAs, DMOs and businesses?

A more resilient sector –

Collaborative effort in this area, let's build on this. Businesses are working together more collaboratively post-COVID.

Young people may not consider VE as a secure career to enter – skills focus required

Digital skills – support to businesses & young people, scale-up existing programmes

Opportunities to learn from each other's projects

Improving connectivity (physical and digital) between destinations to help spread, and develop, skills across the county eg. talent in villages having access to opportunities in larger towns

Accessible and Inclusive

Places to be accessible- Ipswich "15 minute city", test with independent visitors on accessibility.

Inaccessibility of smaller locations is an issue; not accessible by train, bus or easily by cycle from key stations

Important to engage with diverse communities in Suffolk to create a more inclusive visitor economy



Summary and short-term actions

Key messages highlighted on the day included-

- The support for the priorities identified within the Suffolk Visitor economy Development Framework
- The reliance on a “bottom up approach” to a successful Tourism Zone proposal
- The importance of collaborative working, bringing together a voice for the sector, and consistent messages
- Identifying research needs programme, collation of existing sector information, and sharing of information and good practice across all our programmes for the Visitor Economy
- The importance of developing a strong green & carbon neutral ambition embedded through our plans, and the potential for active travel growth.

The following actions (table 3) have been drawn upon and based on the discussions at the workshop and within the breakout groups. Suffolk Growth will engage further with Suffolk Visitor Economy Strategic Group (SVESG) and partners (including VEE) on these actions and monitor delivery. Follow up reports will be available through Suffolk Growth VE updates.

Action / next steps	Lead organisation (s) to work with Suffolk Growth	Timeline
<p>Developing the strategic framework for Suffolk’s Visitor Economy</p> <p>The priorities and workstreams will now be developed with key stakeholders and articulated into delivery activity and programmes. Suffolk’s strategic framework (endorsed by Suffolk Public Sector Leaders) will provide the localised input into the Visit East of England Tourism Action Plan and Tourism Zone proposal.</p>	Suffolk Strategic Visitor Economy Group	June 2021
<p>The reliance on a “bottom up approach” to a successful Tourism Zone proposal</p> <p>Suffolk Growth will provide the point of connection and mechanism for sector wide engagement in the development of Suffolk priorities and workstreams, and provide support within the VEE Tourism Action Plan and Tourism Zone proposals</p>	VEE/ Suffolk Strategic Visitor Economy Group	June 2021 (for Tourism Action Plan) and Ongoing

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<p>The importance of a strong green & carbon neutral ambition embedded through our plans, and the potential for active travel growth.</p> <p>To develop this overarching theme and priority, Suffolk Growth is organising a strategic workshop focusing on “Clean growth and carbon net zero” ambition for Suffolk’s visitor economy to develop priorities and action programmes alongside Suffolk’s Climate Change Emergency Planning Partnership.</p> <p>Coordinate an active travel “workshop” to collaborate on visitor economy development opportunities with key Suffolk stakeholders from transport, environment, health and well-being, and planning.</p>	<p>Suffolk Strategic Visitor Economy Group / Suffolk Climate Change Emergency Partnership</p> <p>Suffolk Strategic Visitor Economy Group/SCC transport</p>	<p>Workshop 28th May 2021</p> <p>July 2021</p>
<p>Identifying research needs programme, collation of existing sector information, and sharing of information and good practice across all our programmes for the Visitor Economy</p> <p>Suffolk Growth working with the SODA, SVESG and VEE will coordinate an annual research /survey programme (funding permitting) to support the growth of the visitor economy.</p> <p>Establish a programme (funding permitting) to update shared visitor economy business and content databases for Suffolk</p> <p>Suffolk Growth will develop an information “hub” within its website to collate existing information, present research, and good practice.</p>	<p>SODA/Suffolk Strategic Visitor Economy Group /VEE</p> <p>Suffolk Strategic Visitor Economy Group</p>	<p>July 2021</p> <p>September 2021</p> <p>June 2021</p>

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<p>The importance of collaborative working, bringing together a voice for the sector, and consistent messages</p> <p>Suffolk Growth will develop a programme of cross sector and business networking opportunities to secure further collaborative working and sector development programmes in line with strategic priorities.</p>	<p>Suffolk Strategic Visitor Economy Group/SCoC/ VEE Skills Group /NALEP/Growth Hub</p>	<p>Implemented 2021/2022</p>
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Please visit the following websites for further information on the work of Suffolk Growth.

www.suffolkgrowth.co.uk

Thank you for attending, please refer any queries to: richard.hunt@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

Suffolk Growth representatives

Name	Organisation
Richard Hunt	Suffolk Growth Partnership
Kay Bonning-Schmitt	Suffolk Growth Partnership
Heidi Bellamy	Culture First facilitator

Attendees

Name	Organisation
James Allen	NALEP
Jo Chapman	East Suffolk Council
Neil Cockshaw	East Suffolk Council
Jack Cripps	All About Ipswich
Helen Cutting	Visit Suffolk

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David Falk	Suffolk County Council
Marie Webster Fitch	East Suffolk Council
Sarah Friswell	St Edmundsbury Cathedral
Michelle Gordon	Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils
Tracey Harding	Discover Newmarket
Jonathon Harvey	University of Suffolk
Sergi Jarques	Destination Research
Jayne Knight	Suffolk County Council
Caroline Mayers	Celebrating Culture 2021
Jonathon Miles	West Suffolk Council
David Metherell	Greater Anglia
Julian Munson	NALEP
Sharon Payne	Suffolk County Council
Alex Pointer	West Suffolk Council
Rachel Price	Sudbury Town Council
Todd Strehlow	Ipswich Borough Council
Andy Walker	Suffolk Chamber of Commerce
Sue Warren	Bury & Beyond
Pete Waters	Visit East of England
Andrew Wheeler	West Suffolk College
Ben Wilder	Suffolk County Council
Helen Wilson	Cultural Board -NALEP
Paul Wood	East Suffolk Council
Hannah Wright	Southwold Town Council
Lyndsay	Xtrahead marketing

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