

Agenda Item 11

Executive Member	Councillor Charles Yarwood – Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Property, Parking & Economic Development		
Strategic Management Team Lead Officer	Jack Straw – Corporate Head of Service		
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Date	18 th April 2017		
Ward (s) affected	All	Key Decision	No
Subject	Recommendations of the Tourist Information Panel		
RECOMMENDATIONS			
The Executive is asked to consider the recommendations made by the Tourist Information Scrutiny Panel, as approved by the Scrutiny Committee on 14 th March 2017 and decide whether they should be implemented or not.			
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY			
The appended report details the work of the Tourist Information Panel who have formulated five recommendations which were endorsed by Scrutiny Committee on 14 th March 2017.			
This report sets out the Panel’s recommendations for the Executive’s consideration. The Executive is asked to decide whether these recommendations should be approved for implementation or not.			
CORPORATE PRIORITIES			
PROSPERITY			
A vibrant local economy with thriving towns and villages			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to drive the transformation of Leatherhead Town Centre and support the market-town culture and economy of Dorking • Work with rural communities and businesses to build on their unique strengths and address their challenges, helping them thrive and become more sustainable 			
The Executive has the authority to determine the Recommendations			

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 At the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8th March 2016 it was agreed that a Scrutiny Panel would be set up to review the provision of tourist information in Mole Valley. The remit of the Panel is set out in Appendix 1 paragraph 1.3.

1.2 A summary of the work of the Tourist Information Panel can be found in the appended report, which was considered by the Scrutiny Committee on 14th March 2017. The recommendations arising from the work of the Panel are that:

- a) The whole issue of the *visitor economy* is considered as a priority area within the forthcoming Economic Prosperity Strategy;

- b) As part of the deliberations associated with the Economic Prosperity Strategy, that the following matters, which the Panel views as being of significant importance, be taken into account and addressed:
 - (i) (Significantly) updating and overhauling the visitor economy web sites and ensuring that effective promotion and marketing of the revised web sites takes place;
 - (ii) Establishing effective mechanisms to ensure that visitor economy related businesses can work together better and that ways of improving overall leadership and co-ordination are explored;
 - (iii) Undertaking further work to identify in what form information related to the visitor economy should take, including investigating what role posters would play as well as improving co-ordination of leaflet distribution and updating;
 - (iv) Investigating how to further maximise the opportunities presented by the annual RideLondon (and cycling in general).
- c) The outputs from the Panel's work, especially the results of the survey, be considered as part of the Economic Prosperity Strategy work;
- d) A specific workshop should be held (as part of the Economic Prosperity Strategy work) to consider the visitor economy and this should include representatives from relevant businesses, visitors and others appropriate groups and individuals to help inform the debate (this workshop could be combined with an associated workshop such as the rural economy but the Panel wish this issue to be given due prominence);
- e) Subject to suitable resources being made available, that:
 - (i) £3,000 be allocated to enable the Council to commission a follow up *visitor economy* survey with Visit Surrey to be undertaken in the summer months so as to address the concerns raised in the first winter survey. The results of both the winter and summer survey would be fed into the Economic Prosperity Strategy.
 - (ii) £5,000 be allocated to enable the Council to provide resources to ensure that the existing Visit Dorking and Visit Leatherhead web sites are developed, maintained and updated.

1.3 The Scrutiny Committee endorsed the recommendations of the Tourist Information Panel and is now asking the Executive to formally approve them for implementation.

Financial Implications

See Appendix 1 paragraph 6.2

Legal Implications

See Appendix 1 paragraph 6.3

2.0 OPTIONS

The following options are available to the Executive for determination.

Option 1: Do not accept the Recommendations

Do not accept the recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee and leave current tourist information provision at its present level.

Option 2: Amend the Recommendations for Implementation

The Executive may decide to implement some or all of the recommendations in an amended form.

Option 3: Approve some of the Recommendations for Implementation

The Executive has the option to approve selected recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee and reject the others.

Option 4: Approve all of the Recommendations for Implementation.

The Executive has the option to approve all of the recommendations put forward by the Scrutiny Committee.

3.0 CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Monitoring Officer commentary

See Appendix 1 paragraph 7.1

S151 Officer commentary

See Appendix 1 paragraph 7.2

Risk Implications

See Appendix 1 paragraph 7.3

Equalities Implications

See Appendix 1 paragraph 7.4

Employment Issues

See Appendix 1 paragraph 7.5

Sustainability Issues

See Appendix 1 paragraph 7.6

Consultation

See Appendix 1 paragraph 7.7

Communications

None required for this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Scrutiny Committee report – 8th March 2016: Agenda Item 5

Scrutiny Committee Minutes – 8th March 2016

Scrutiny Committee report – 14th March 2017: Agenda Item 8 Appendices 1 - 4

Scrutiny Committee Report – 14th March 2017

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Date	14 th March 2017

Ward (s) affected	All
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Subject	Summary of findings from the Tourist Information Scrutiny Panel.
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RECOMMENDATIONS

The Scrutiny Committee is asked:-

1. To note the report and the extensive work of the Tourist Information Scrutiny Panel:
2. To agree the recommendations of the Panel on the provision of tourist information and refer these to the Executive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the summary of findings from the work of the Tourist Information Scrutiny Panel (the Panel). The panel met on four occasions between 19th September 2016 and 1st March 2017. The Panel was charged with considering whether there was a demand for tourist information over and above what was currently provided, how any improvements could be funded, whether it would be possible to use volunteers and what might be involved in doing so and finally whether there were any lessons to be learnt from elsewhere about providing tourist information.

The panel discovered that tourism, or more accurately the visitor economy was big business for Surrey and Mole Valley, in particular, and that a lot of jobs were dependent upon it. As such, it became increasingly apparent that tourist information should be considered in a much wider strategic context and so the panel wished the issue of the visitor economy to be included as a priority area within the forthcoming Economic Prosperity Strategy work and in particular the workshops.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report sets out the summary of findings from the work of the Tourist Information Scrutiny Panel (the Panel).
- 1.2 The Panel has met on four occasions between 19th September 2016 and 1st March 2017¹.

¹ Meeting One: 19th September 2016, Meeting Two: 7th November 2016, Meeting Three: 27th January 2017 and Meeting Four: 1st March 2017.

- 1.3** The scope of the Panel's work was to investigate the options for improving the availability of tourist information in Mole Valley. The investigation established:
- a) Whether there was a demand for tourist information services in Mole Valley over and above what is currently provided.
 - b) How improvements would be funded including any possible financial cost to Mole Valley District Council (MVDC)
 - c) Whether it would be possible to use volunteers to provide tourist information and what is required from MVDC in order to support them.
 - d) Whether, from experience, there are any lessons to be learned about providing tourist information elsewhere in Surrey and the South East.
- 1.4** The Tourist Information Scrutiny Panel would like to thank the following people for their contributions:
- Anna Tomkins, Visit Surrey
 - Wendy Saunders, Squiggle Design
 - Grant Harrison, Design Lynx
 - Sally Dubery, VAMS
 - Peter Camp, Dorking Museum
 - Georgina Dawkins, Dorking Town Partnership and BID Proposing body

2.0 LESSONS TO LEARN FROM ELSEWHERE

- 2.1** The Panel decided to begin its investigations by discovering what lessons could be learnt from elsewhere in Surrey, the South East and nationally (this is primarily referring to 1.3 (d) above).
- 2.2** Anna Tomkins, from *Visit Surrey*, was invited to address the Panel (her presentation is included as Appendix One). During the discussion, the Panel noted that *Visit Surrey* was a Community Interest Company (CIC)² and Surrey's official Destination Management Organisation (DMO)³ and that they were supported by, and worked with, various agencies including Surrey County Council, the Districts and Borough Councils (including MVDC), the University of Surrey and others.
- 2.3** The Panel also learnt that in recent years the structure of tourism had become fragmented with the focus being nationally upon *Visit England* and *Visit Britain*. This was a national tourism agency which was a non-departmental public body funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Local Tourist Boards no longer exist and it was up to local areas to determine what resources, if any, they invest in tourism.
- 2.4** The Panel noted that the term "*tourism*" was not used so much these days and that a more preferable description was "*visitor economy*". This is because the visitor economy is a more realistic description which includes indigenous communities (from individual Boroughs and Districts and Surrey) spending their money within their own areas as well as those visiting from elsewhere in the country and the rest of the world.
- 2.5** A summary of the estimated value of Surrey's Visitor Economy in 2012 (the most

² A Community Interest Company is a category of company which is intended for social enterprises that want to use their profits and assets for the public good.

³ A Destination Management Organisations manage tourism locally. In some areas of the country, a single entity is created to coordinate the management of the destination. They come in a variety of shapes and sizes, handling everything from management to marketing.

recent date where figures are available) is shown in Table One:

Table One: Summary of the estimated value Surrey’s Visitor Economy 2012
(Source: Visit Surrey)

Item	Surrey	Mole Valley
Estimated turnover of Visitor Economy (£GBP)	2bn	201m
Estimated number of jobs supported by the visitor economy	35,000	3,300
Number of day visits per year	26m	2.9m
Number of nights spent per year	8.5m	768,000

- 2.6** The Panel noted that Tourist Information Centres (TICs) and Visitor Information Centres (VICs) were primarily intended for people who are already in the town (either here by choice or for some other reason, via business for instance). They provided assistance, help and information for visitors and were created pre-internet. The main drawback is that they are very expensive, time and labour intensive and the cost-benefit (especially with the advent of the internet, smart phones, tablets and other mobile technology) did not really provide good value for money, particularly in light of constrained public sector funding with competing demands from other, more pressing, priorities and choices. In many parts of the country TICs and VICs had closed because of these reasons. In fact, there was only one fully operational TIC in Surrey, based in Guildford, although there were other solutions provided elsewhere in the county. The places in the country that have kept them have tended to be high footfall “honeypot” areas whose broader economy largely depends upon the visitor economy or where these have been combined with other commercially viable operations which can subsidise the TIC/VIC. A report from Visit England containing case studies providing information on “alternative delivery models” is contained as Appendix Two. No evidence was found during the Panel’s work which suggested that there was such a viable alternative income stream to subsidise a TIC/VIC in Mole Valley.
- 2.7** It was established, however, that the *visitor economy* was significant for both Surrey and Mole Valley and the Panel realised, quite early in their deliberations, that considering “tourist information” in isolation would not be sufficient for this important area of work. It became clear that the *visitor economy* should be considered in the wider context of the overall priorities of the district and as such should form a part of the forthcoming Economic Prosperity Strategy and this will form one of the recommendations to the Executive.

3.0 VOLUNTEERS AND VENUES FOR A POTENTIAL TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE AND WEB SITES

- 3.1** This section primarily corresponds to 1.3 (c) above.
- 3.2** Sally Dubery, Chief Executive at Voluntary Action Mid Surrey (VAMS) addressed the Panel and explained that VAMS was a volunteer centre that covered Dorking, Leatherhead and other rural areas locally. VAMS currently had approximately 200 volunteers signed up in the Mole Valley area, with a vast variety of roles available to volunteers through the 450 organisations that are signed up with VAMS. There is a wide range of roles available to volunteers varying from administration right through

to goat herders and a variety of activities in between.

- 3.3** The Panel was advised that local people tended to have a passion for the culture of the area and this had resulted in organisations offering cultural volunteering opportunities, with the National Trust and Dorking Museum, in particular, proving to be popular. As many of these kinds of opportunities were over-subscribed (and as they would be providing services similar to those of a Tourist Information Centre) Mrs Dubery felt that there would likely be little difficulty in finding volunteers for a resurrected form of Tourist Information Centre, if one were to be created at some point in the future.
- 3.4** Whilst the provision of volunteers would be a necessary requirement, it would not be sufficient. The Panel noted that a significant budget would be required to provide the appropriate level of management, staff training and comprehensive support needed to ensure that the service was maintained and managed to a high standard. As this would be a highly resource intensive activity, it was felt that further investigation was required, with the survey helping to assist in this process.
- 3.5** The other consideration was related to venue hosting. The Panel acknowledged that a dedicated venue would be uneconomic and unviable. The possibility of “piggy-backing” on another venue was assessed and approaches made to both Leatherhead Theatre and Dorking Halls to explore whether they could host a potential Tourist Information Centre. In both instances, no objection was given but it was acknowledged that a considerable amount of planning, and ongoing management would be required to make such a venture a success.
- 3.6** Whilst on the surface, at least, there seemed to be opportunities for both manning (with volunteers) and hosting (via piggy-backing from existing ventures) a potential Tourist Information Centre, there remained concerns relating to potentially high (and therefore prohibitively expensive) costs and intensity associated with managing and maintaining the service; it was also questionable whether there would be sufficient demand for such a service especially when compared to alternative, much more cost effective, delivery solutions; again the survey was intended to inform these aspects.
- 3.7** In pursuit of looking at alternative delivery solutions, the Panel was particularly interested in learning more about the potential for web sites providing tourist information. There are currently two “legacy” tourist related web sites in existence in Mole Valley – Visit Leatherhead (serving Leatherhead and the surrounding areas) and Visit Dorking (serving Dorking and the surrounding areas). Both sites were in a poor condition due to the fact that they had not been maintained for some time. As a direct result of the work of the Panel both sites have been reviewed and work has commenced on revitalizing them. The Dorking site has been significantly improved and the Leatherhead site will be addressed shortly. Both of these exercises were acknowledged as “make do and mend” in lieu of a more thorough review of the web site (perhaps as part of the Economic Prosperity Strategy). Wendy Sanders of Squiggle Design and Grant Harrison, Design Lynx presented to the Panel on this subject and their presentation is attached as Appendix Three. The Panel will recommend that resources up to a maximum of £5,000 be allocated to ensure that the current legacy websites continue to be developed, maintained and updated, in lieu of a more permanent solution being provided as a result of the forthcoming Economic Prosperity Strategy..
- 3.8** It was felt, as a result of the knowledge gleaned from assessing manning, venues and alternative solutions, that it was necessary for a survey to be commissioned to better understand whether there was a demand for tourist information services in Mole Valley over and above what was currently provided.

4.0 RESEARCH COMMISSIONED TO ASSESS WHETHER THERE IS DEMAND FOR TOURIST INFORMATION OVER AND ABOVE WHAT IS CURRENTLY PROVIDED

- 4.1 This section primarily corresponds to 1.3 (a) above.
- 4.2 At the meeting of the Tourist Information Panel on 7th November 2017, *Visit Surrey* were commissioned to undertake a research study to better understand whether there is demand for tourist information over and above what is currently provided in the district. This was one of the key terms of reference of the Panel and the costs of the research were contained within existing Economic Development Service budgets.
- 4.3 The research was conducted during November and December 2016, which was not ideal timing. This constraint was acknowledged by the Panel at the time of commissioning and necessary allowances were made.
- 4.4 Two audiences were surveyed: businesses (supply-side) and visitors (demand side).
- 4.5 Nine businesses were interviewed, with each interview lasting approximately an hour. They were conducted on the basis of anonymity in an effort to encourage open expression from the responders.
- 4.6 Visitors were surveyed in both Dorking and Leatherhead, with 103 people interviewed.
- 4.7 The results of the survey are detailed in Appendix Four of this report.
- 4.8 The conclusions of the survey are summarised below:
 - 4.8.1 Both businesses and visitors identified that the visitor web site(s) needed to be substantially improved. This was seen as a high priority.
 - 4.8.2 The current Visit Leatherhead and Visit Dorking web sites were little known about.
 - 4.8.3 There was a desire for the tourism related businesses to work together to provide a better co-ordinated approach. At present there seemed to be a lack of cohesive action and leadership. It was felt that this could be addressed as part of the Economic Prosperity Strategy process and, in particular, should be addressed in the forthcoming workshops.
 - 4.8.4 Many businesses felt that a TIC was not appropriate and although visitors seemed to want more information, the research results were not conclusive as to how this should be provided. Although a surprising amount of visitors did seem to like posters, it was suggested that this aspect should be investigated further.
 - 4.8.5 Business still used leaflets and visitors like them, as well, but a more co-ordinated approach to leaflet distribution, housekeeping and updating needed to take place.
 - 4.8.6 The research highlighted the importance of local people to the visitor economy, especially during the winter months.
 - 4.8.7 There was a feeling that the annual RideLondon (and cycling in general) was currently a missed opportunity.
 - 4.8.8 It was clear that tourism and the visitor economy needed to be considered in a wider context and that this should be a key focus or priority within the forthcoming Economic Prosperity Strategy and should be addressed in the forthcoming workshops.

4.9 Given the constraints outlined in paragraph 4.3 above, the Panel recommends that a second survey following the same methodology previously be undertaken in the summer months so as to address the concerns raised in the first winter survey. The results of both the winter and summer survey would be fed into the Economic Prosperity Strategy. The cost of such a survey will be in the region of £3,000.

5.0 HOW IMPROVEMENTS WOULD BE FUNDED INCLUDING ANY POSSIBLE FINANCIAL COST TO MVDC

5.1 This section primarily corresponds to 1.3 (b) above.

5.2 The Panel's work has clearly identified that improvements to the existing situation can be made. As has been highlighted in paragraph 2.7 above, it has also been established that the visitor economy in Surrey and Mole Valley was large and trying to consider "tourist information" in isolation would not be sufficient for this important area of work. The Panel realised that the *visitor economy* should be considered in the wider context and overall priorities of the district and as such should form a part of the forthcoming Economic Prosperity Strategy.

5.3 Furthermore, it was not clear that there was demand for a traditional Tourist Information Centre at all. Indeed, there was evidence from the local business community that such an approach would not be welcome. Many other options were preferred and the most popular of these was to significantly update and overhaul the *visitor economy* web sites.

5.4 So, rather than the Panel looking to quantify the cost of any piecemeal improvements, at this stage, it was preferred that a more strategic approach to the whole question of the *visitor economy* be taken but this was beyond the scope of the Panel.

5.5 With this in mind, the Panel has made a number of recommendations to the Scrutiny Committee, which it needs to consider whether to refer to the Executive to progress.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TOURIST INFORMATION PANEL

6.1 The Panel recommends to the Scrutiny Committee that:

- a) The whole issue of the *visitor economy* is considered as a priority area within the forthcoming Economic Prosperity Strategy;
- b) As part of the deliberations associated with the Economic Prosperity Strategy, that the following matters, which the Panel views as being of significant importance, be taken into account and addressed:
 - (i) (Significantly) updating and overhauling the visitor economy web sites and ensuring that effective promotion and marketing of the revised web sites takes place;
 - (ii) Establishing effective mechanisms to ensure that visitor economy related businesses can work together better and that ways of improving overall leadership and co-ordination are explored;
 - (iii) Undertaking further work to identify in what form information related to the visitor economy should take, including investigating what role posters would play as well as improving co-ordination of leaflet distribution and updating;
 - (iv) Investigating how to further maximise the opportunities presented by the annual RideLondon (and cycling in general).
- c) The outputs from the Panel's work, especially the results of the survey, be

considered as part of the Economic Prosperity Strategy work;

- d) A specific workshop should be held (as part of the Economic Prosperity Strategy work) to consider the visitor economy and this should include representatives from relevant businesses, visitors and others appropriate groups and individuals to help inform the debate (this workshop could be combined with an associated workshop such as the rural economy but the panel wish this issue to be given due prominence);
- e) Subject to suitable resources being made available, that:
 - (i) £3,000 be allocated to enable the Council to commission a follow up *visitor economy* survey with Visit Surrey to be undertaken in the summer months so as to address the concerns raised in the first winter survey. The results of both the winter and summer survey would be fed into the Economic Prosperity Strategy.
 - (ii) £5,000 be allocated to enable the Council to provide resources to ensure that the existing Visit Dorking and Visit Leatherhead web sites are developed, maintained and updated.

6.2 Financial Implications

Funding of £8K is needed to overhaul the visitor websites and finance a further survey. These resources have not been identified yet but the related revenue budgets in Economic Development and Planning should be reviewed for 2017/18 to see if any contribution can be identified. The substantial overhaul of the websites will create an enhanced asset so there may be potential to fund from capital. The monitoring position on the capital minor works programme will be investigated.

6.3 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

7.0 CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Monitoring Officer Commentary

The Monitoring Officer is satisfied that all relevant legal implications have been considered.

7.2 S151 Officer Commentary

The s151 Officer confirms that all relevant financial risks and implications have been taken into account.

7.3 Risk Implications

The visitor economy is already making a significant contribution to the economic prosperity of the district. The main risk of not adopting the recommendations would be that the opportunities to augment, better co-ordinate and unlock the full potential of the local visitor economy may not be fully exploited.

7.4 Equalities Implications

The improvement of the co-ordination of the visitor economy will provide significant opportunities for employment growth for the economy generally. There are no equalities issues directly affecting MVDC..

7.5 Employment Issues

None

7.6 Sustainability Issues

There are no implications for Sustainability in the recommendations.

7.7 Consultation

The consultation is set out in the report.

7.8 Communications

No press release is required at this stage.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None