Growth Infrastructure and Environment Policy Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Growth, Infrastructure and Environment Policy Committee held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Thursday 9 March 2017 at 2:00pm

Committee Members Present: Councillors: B Stone (Chairman), P Broome, M Dewsbury, K Kiddie, T Lewis and K Worsley

Apologies: Councillor: J Larner

Cabinet Members in attendance: Councillors: Y Bendle and C Hudson

Other Members in attendance: Councillors: V Bell, B Bernard, F Ellis, M Gray, T Palmer, B Riches, R Savage and V Thomson

Officers in Attendance: The Head of Economic Development (J Munson) and the Senior Economic Growth Coordinator (D Disney)

7. MINUTES

The minutes of the Growth, Infrastructure and Environment Policy Committee meeting held on 4 October 2016 were agreed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.
8. VISITOR ECONOMY INITIATIVE

Members considered the report of the Senior Economic Growth Coordinator, which sought to update the Committee on the evolution and transformation of the Market Towns Initiative (MTI) into the proposed new Visitor Economy Initiative (VIE). Officers advised that, due to the national increase in consumers shopping online, more people were now visiting towns for tourism purposes rather than shopping locally for everyday retail purchases. Consequently, the footfall in market towns now consisted of more visitors than local residents.

The Committee was pleased to note that the Visitor Economy Initiative would continue with the Council’s commitment to encourage and up-skill local businesses to achieve a presence online, to match the changes in spending patterns of consumers. It was also noted that tourism and overnight stays had increased in the County but that the percentage of people employed in tourism in South Norfolk was lower than the average for the County. Members questioned why tourism was lower than average in the District and it was suggested that this could be due to the lack of a coastline, but also could be attributed to the lack of hotels and insufficient car parking in many of the towns and villages. It was noted that the development of hotels was driven by need and that evidence of such need would have to be identified before developers would have any financial incentive to consider developing business in the area. It was suggested by a member that Big Sky Developments might like to consider the provision of hotels in market towns. The Committee discussed car parking problems in various towns and villages and it was suggested that the Council might approach landowners such as farmers, churches and local businesses to ascertain whether they would consider allocating some of their land, on a commercial basis, for car parking. Officers agreed to consider these suggestions further.

The Senior Economic Growth Coordinator advised the Committee of the proposed action plan to implement the VIE which would begin with a complete audit of the existing provisions and services including accommodation, restaurants and tourism currently offered in the District. Once analysed and reviewed, this information would be used to prioritise a coordinated series of projects for the three-year programme. Members were re-assured that existing publications such as cycling, heritage and rambling maps would be included in the overall audit and assessment, and that the Council would work with existing tourism services such as Trip Adviser and Booking.com. Members were advised that future plans for towns included digital town tours and trails, which could be downloaded to visitors’ smartphones either prior to their visit or upon arrival. In response to a query regarding the future of Tourist Information Centres, officers advised that the VIE was concentrating on the digital aspect of tourism and the ability to raise awareness of tourism to visitors by working collaboratively with central organisations such as Visit Norfolk. It was hoped that people searching for somewhere to stay in Norfolk would be able to download trail maps and information regarding the attractions in South Norfolk.
In response to a query regarding the financing and funding of the project, officers advised that finances for the pilot project were included within the Council’s business plans. It was anticipated that, should the project prove successful, funding would be secured to widen out the programme to other areas in the District. Members noted that a mapping project was already underway in Alburgh and once that was completed, more evidence regarding the successes and future of the project would be available. It was also noted that one FTE staff member role had been approved, to manage and oversee the project.

Members questioned the method by which the success of the project would be measured and stressed the importance of having a quantifiable outcome. Officers advised that this would be achieved through an annual report by Visit Norfolk which would advise of the number of visitors to towns and villages, and could also be measured by the numbers of people downloading trail maps of the District.

Members were generally in favour of the plans and it was;

RESOLVED:

to RECOMMEND TO CABINET the Visitor Economy Initiative, taking into account the above views of the Growth, Infrastructure and Environment Policy Committee regarding accommodation, car parking and the ability to measure the success of the project.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted that the date of the next meeting would be confirmed by email.

(The meeting closed at 3.03 pm)

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Chairman