

The Suffolk Coast Destination Management Organisation

V8 Draft business plan and three-year funding proposal 2024 to 2027



Executive Summary

The Suffolk Coast DMO (TSC) is one of the ¹highest performing tourism marketing organisations in the region across Suffolk and Norfolk. Since its inception in 2012, it has become a highly respected organisation by East Suffolk's tourism businesses, representing excellent value for money by delivering impactful, data driven marketing campaigns to promote the destination, offering robust support to its members and the wider tourism industry, and consistently providing quality content and up to date information for visitors to the area.

Over the next 3 years, factoring in additional income from SZC, TSC will look to increase membership income by 20%, increase advertising revenue by 31% and increase marketing activity by 27%. It will grow membership from 250 to 300, and through its exemplary reputation with tourism businesses in East Suffolk and the wider area, will be a powerful representative for the sector, strengthening relationships with all stakeholders and individuals alike. The business plan and funding proposal presents a scenario with the implications of the development of SZC in the area.

TSC has a proven track record in operating strategically, ²demonstrating its ability to be flexible and adapt quickly and efficiently to market forces, vital qualities needed to navigate the next three years and onwards, which will see the development of multiple Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects in the area. Whilst NSIPs will have a major impact on the area, TSC is keenly aware of the opportunity that exists to promote East Suffolk to a wider domestic audience, positioning it as a highly attractive alternative to other popular areas such as Devon, Cornwall and the Southwest, helping to mitigate some impacts of the NSIPs.

TSC understands the importance of developing tourism sustainably. It will continue working closely with Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape to protect the destination, alongside supporting the

¹ Based on website sessions and social media audiences of DMO's and other tourism organisations in Suffolk and Norfolk

² All marketing campaigns are data driven with clear KPIs that are met or exceeded.

tourism industry to thrive, by producing and promoting stunning imagery and inspirational content to encourage visitors to fall in love with, respect, protect and enjoy the wonderful landscapes, culture and sensitive environments that make up our beautiful destination.

1. Mission, Purpose, and Achievements to Note

- 1.1. TSC was initially established in 2012 with a simple aim - to support responsible tourism and the visitor economy, through data driven marketing, and to serve its membership by providing businesses with new routes to markets. The goal has always been to grow the visitor economy sustainably, by boosting tourism in the shoulder seasons.
- 1.2. TSC has successfully marketed the destination over the last 12 years through the development of an industry leading website www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk, with over 801,000 visits per year, an engaged list of over 30,000 consumer facing subscribers, excellent social media communications with an audience of over 48,000, and targeted advertising activity. In addition, our involvement with the National Significant Infrastructure Projects, managing communications of the Covid-19 crisis, and providing support for and contributing to the Norfolk and Suffolk DMO coalition, has increased the presence and authority of the organisation. We are proud of our achievements and continue to be a dynamic, creative, and trustworthy organisation, well respected by East Suffolk's tourism businesses and organisations.
- 1.3. The research conducted by TSC in 2019 on 'The Energy Coast Implications, impact & opportunities for tourism on the Suffolk Coast' demonstrated that whilst The Suffolk Coast is in a highly competitive market for days out and holidays, even amongst its key near regional audience of those living in a 90-minute radius, there is a very clear opportunity to increase visit consideration through targeted marketing campaigns.
- 1.4. Amongst a nationally representative sample of those living within a 90-minute radius of the area, base consideration for visiting the Suffolk Coast for holidays/days out in the future was 26%. That was less than for the Norfolk Coast, 32%, although still higher than for the Essex Coast, 20%. Cornwall and Devon were the most considered destinations, on a par with Norfolk and Suffolk, even within the near regional market. There is a very clear opportunity to increase visit consideration through targeted marketing campaigns.

How do we view the future?

- 1.5. TSC's continued aim is to support and encourage a thriving visitor economy in East Suffolk, through delivering data and insight driven campaigns. Over the next three years, alongside our core activity, TSC is perfectly positioned to be the marketing delivery partner for destination campaigns associated with the SZC Tourism Fund and other mitigation funds relating to NSIPs.
- 1.6. TSC acknowledges that the way the Visitor Economy is managed at both Local, County and National levels is experiencing change. With the disbanding of LEPs, County Devolution Deals and the emerging LVEP structure, TSC is well placed to support the transitions that are taking place and will continue to work closely with all relevant stakeholders to ensure the success of any new models put into place.
- 1.7. Over the coming years, East Suffolk will see the development of multiple energy NSIPs. It is vital that TSC engages now with new visitors before the main impact of these projects takes place. We must build allegiance through brand awareness to reassure both existing and new visitors that irrespective of the level of development, the Suffolk Coast has plenty to offer a wide and diverse audience.

2. What are we asking for?

- 2.1 To deliver the important work identified in this document, TSC requires the security of core funding each year from East Suffolk Council as laid out in the 3-year financial model attached. Previously East Suffolk Council's core funding has not had inflationary increases, this has been absorbed by TSC. Our proposal shows an overall increase in the annual contribution of 10% across the 3 years.
- 2.2 TSC is a trusted authority and has willingly taken on additional responsibility whilst continuing with its core marketing function. Working more closely with East Suffolk than at any point in the organisation's 12-year history TSC is recognised and widely respected as the official tourism organisation for the destination. We wish for this to continue.
- 2.3 Over the past four years, along with our members, we have had to ride wave after wave of problems and disruptions. Covid, followed by the fuel supply crisis, then soaring inflation, interest rate increases and extraordinary weather events. Throughout these troubles TSC has remained steady, flexible, and able to respond with effective solutions to help the visitor economy. We want to continue to be the go-to place for our members looking for help and vital support.
- 2.4 TSC has reflected the commencement of Sizewell C in this proposal. TSC is part of the SZC Tourism Working Group and is ideally placed to be the marketing delivery partner for destination campaigns associated with the SZC Tourism Fund. Whilst we are awaiting a final investment decision, details of the date of commencement, and allocation of the Tourism Fund, we recognise it is imperative to factor in the SZC Tourism Fund to this proposal, and the impact this will have on marketing the destination to support impacted businesses, organisations, and communities.

3. TSC Team

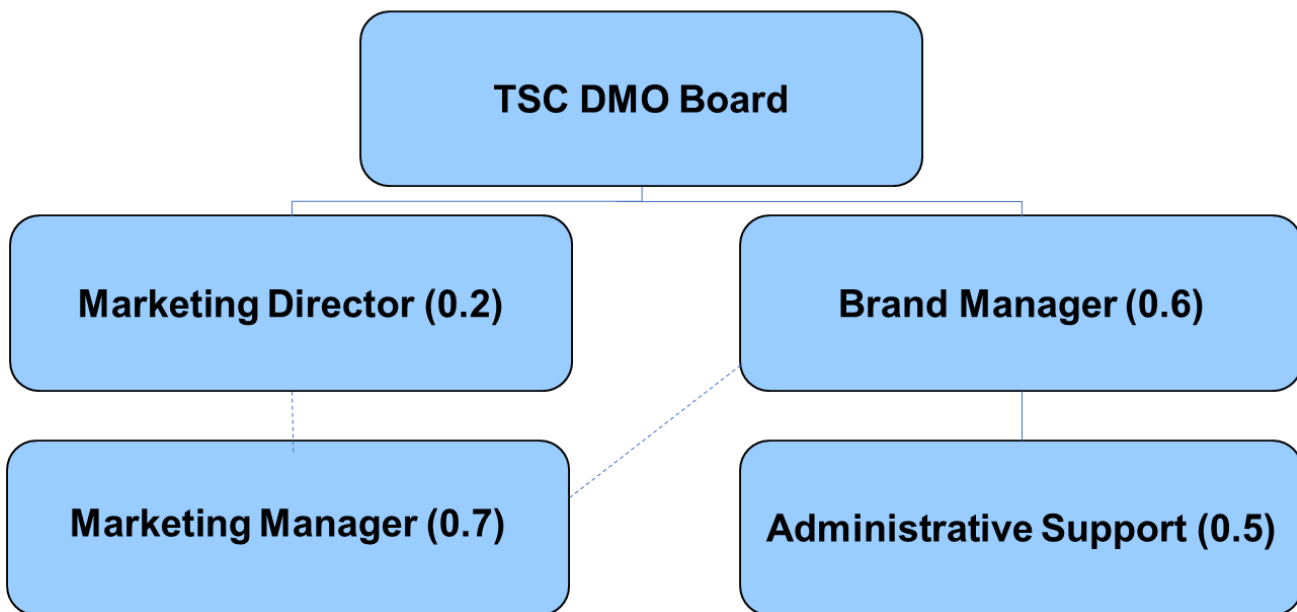
3.1 TSC currently has an experienced volunteer board of Directors and a small but hugely skilled executive team.

3.2 The board has representatives from Adnams Plc, Britten Pears Arts, The Hotel Folk, The Yeo Group, and Attain Solutions Ltd. The four annual board meetings are attended by officers from East Suffolk Council and Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscapes.

3.3 The executive team currently comprises Annie Willey (Brand Manager, 0.6), Julian Evans (Marketing Director, 0.2), Beccie Amer (Marketing Manager, 0.7) and Shelley Spring (Administrator, 0.5). This totals 2.0 FTE roles. We have illustrated in this proposal how the organisation's structure would change, when the SZC Tourism Fund Marketing Manager role commences. We would like this post to sit within TSC to ensure maximum marketing support is delivered to impacted businesses, organisations, and communities.

3.4 TSC Current Organisational Structure

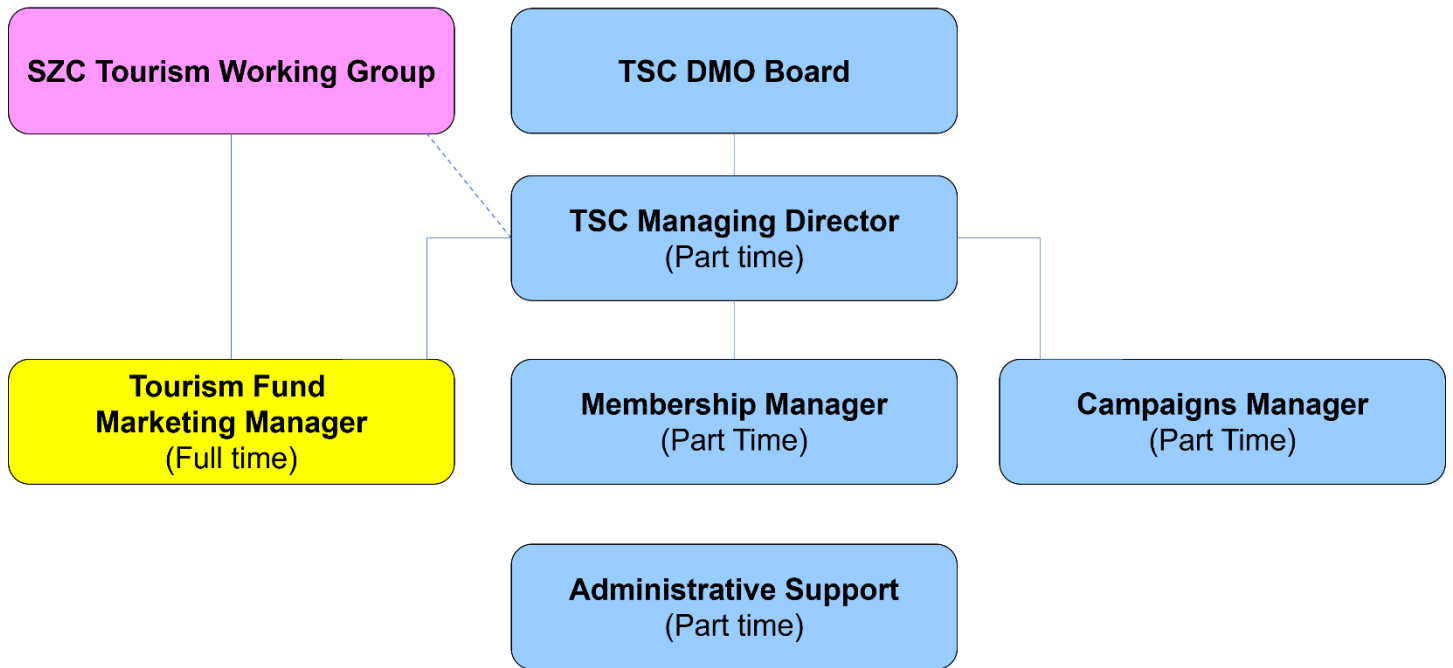
The Suffolk Coast DMO Current Structure



3.5 Proposed new structure with SZC Tourism Fund Resource

Conversations are ongoing between ESC and the DMO as to how the Tourism Fund Marketing Manager post should integrate with the DMO. TSC's preferred structure would be a complete review of the staffing structure, with the creation of a new Managing Director role. Although the cost of this restructure is not included in the budget, TSC wishes to continue conversations with working group colleagues to use SZC Tourism Fund budget to achieve the restructure.

The Suffolk Coast DMO Structure including SZC Tourism Fund Resource



4. Membership

4.1 TSC's current membership stands at 250 tourism businesses and organisations, and despite the challenging economic climate, our retention rate is high at 93% and membership continues to grow. TSC's target across the 3 years is to achieve 300 members in the year 2026 – 2027.

4.2 The annual membership fee is currently £131 + VAT, this has increased over a three-year period from £110 + VAT. TSC's membership offer is among the best value for money in the region, it operates a simple structure, where members have access to the same benefits from being able to add website offers, events, update listing pages, be curated into our website and social media content, feature in relevant town guides and other blogs. They are kept up to speed with tourism industry news, funding opportunities and information from East Suffolk Council and other stakeholders around net zero, sustainability, diversity, audience insights and data. In addition to the standard services provided through membership, members can enhance the visibility of their business by sending us their news and content and tagging us on social media. They can also take advantage of advertising opportunities which provide additional revenue for TSC.

4.3 Membership reflects the following split of businesses by primary activity across the sector; 44% accommodation, 33% visitor attractions, 14% hospitality and local food and drink producers, with the remaining 8% including retail, weddings and tourism associations. As TSC's marketing activity increases, its audiences will grow, it will become more visible to both visitors and tourism businesses, which in turn will increase membership. We envision growth in membership numbers across all sectors, including secondary spend providers.

5. Sources of income and core costs

The operational costs for TSC to function at the same level as demonstrated in recent years are c£143k.

The core costs should be covered in the following ways, as outlined in the financial attachment.

5.1 East Suffolk Council's core grant funding is crucial to the viability of TSC, accounting for 45% of core income in 2023/24 dropping to 39% for 2026/27 (not including SZC Tourism Fund income). (It represented 60% of core income in 2019).

5.2 Membership fees, which require significant effort to manage, currently provides c.25% of TSC's annual income in 2023/24, rising to 31% in 2026/27.

5.3 The team has continued to work hard to raise additional sums through advertising revenues, and in 2022 introduced new packages which help income generation. This provides c.16% of TSC's annual income in 23/24, rising to 21% in 2026/27.

5.4 ESC has provided other funding for conferences, and the highly successful 'Festival and Events Fund' which allows TSC to support local activities with high quality marketing services.

5.5 Funding from the SZC Tourism Fund to TSC has been modelled at £200K per annum, (although this could fluctuate year to year depending on the activity agreed through the Tourism Working Group and documented in the Annual Tourism Implementation Plan). The £200K does not include costs associated with the Tourism Fund Marketing Manager post documented in the Deed of Obligation. It covers focused promotion of the destination as determined by the Annual Tourism Implementation Plan and other associated DMO costs.

5.6 All marketing and campaign activity will be driven by data and insights, which it is assumed will be sourced through the £71K per year, specified in the Deed of Obligation for research and monitoring of the Tourism Fund.

6. Marketing Activity

6.1 A core strength of TSC is the knowledge and skills available to support marketing activity within the executive team. The current team are contracted on a freelance basis, and all run their own businesses specialising in print and digital advertising, social media, SEO, PR, website development, content

delivery, and event management. TSC delivers results without engaging expensive advertising agencies.

6.2 The primary marketing focus in the three-year plan is to continue to work on TSC website and audience engagement through social media and email channels, this is covered in the core DMO costs.

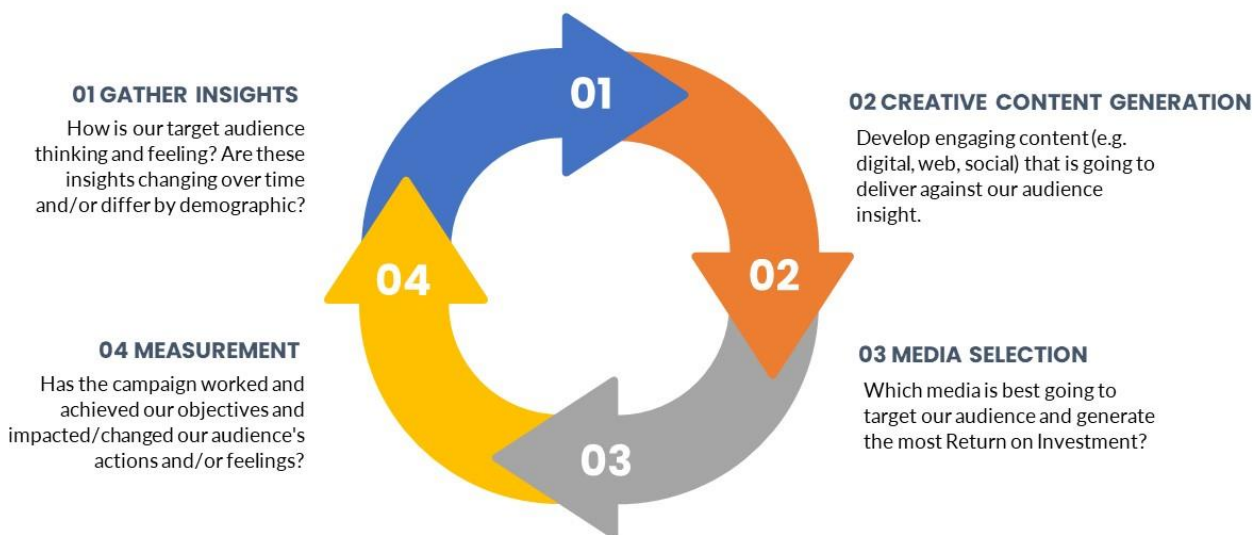
6.3 In addition to this work, TSC will be the conduit to deliver the Festival and Events Marketing Support funding for East Suffolk Council, this has proven to be an incredibly successful method of supporting local events that attracts new visitors to the region. The support for this is covered within the core costs of TSC.

6.4 We will continue to be a key player in the DMO coalition to ensure that East Suffolk gets the best output from their contribution to the marketing activity, driven through Visit East of England. The support for this is covered within the core costs of TSC and will continue through in the three-year plan.

6.5 The outlook for the visitor economy on the Suffolk Coast will be greatly influenced by the energy NSIPs. TSC will continue with a flexible and reactive approach as plans are confirmed, something that the organisation has prided itself on delivering over the last three challenging years.

6.6 All marketing activity will be driven by data and insights as demonstrated in below.

Our Process towards Campaign Development



7. Regional and national networking

7.1 TSC has devoted time and energy into fostering strong local links with BIDs, the DMO coalition and town management groups in East Suffolk, Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape, and the wider Suffolk area. We work closely with other industry organisations such as The Tourism Alliance, the National Coastal Tourism Academy, and VisitEngland to ensure our members' views are represented on many issues. We will continue to strengthen these relationships.

8. Local Visitor Economy Partnerships

8.1 Suffolk County Council and the district councils are undertaking a review of the visitor economy across Suffolk which will be completed early 2024. The review covers:

- the role that New Anglia LEP has in tourism now and the devolvement back into Suffolk County Council,
- the roles of the Suffolk DMO's, Visit Suffolk and Visit East of England
- The resources within the district councils and the plans for LVEPs (Local Visitor Economy Partnerships).

8.2 Any LVEP that is created for Suffolk could direct funding from VE to deliver a wide range of objectives.

8.3 Visit East of England are working with Norfolk County Council to create a Norfolk LVEP. VEE would like to see a joint Norfolk and Suffolk LVEP run by Visit East of England. TSC will support any emerging LVEP for Suffolk, whether it be for the county or across the wider region.

9 Key Performance Indicators 2024 to 2027

Please note the KPIs do not include those which will be developed in line with the Tourism Fund Implementation Plan, approved by the Tourism Fund Working Group.

9.1 Revenue

Increase membership numbers from 250 in 2023 to 300 by 2027

Increase advertising income from 16% to 20% of total revenue by 2027

9.2 Marketing Activity

When looking at marketing activity the most obvious measure is the number of sessions and page views for websites, and followers/likes for social media channels.

Setting KPI's that look at the top-level audience figures is not the right thing for the DMO to do. Our marketing activity over the next few years may require us to take a tactical approach to meet specific objectives. Any KPI that is focused on overall growth could conflict with a tactical approach because there is a huge difference in campaign strategy that would be applied.

9.2.1 Website

As the official tourism organisation for the Suffolk Coast and host of the website and social media platforms, we recognise the importance of growing these audiences to promote the visitor economy.

Rather than a focus on the total figure the KPI's should focus on organic traffic – this is the audience that we attract through content, creative posts, and SEO (search engine optimisation). This activity falls within the core work undertaken by the team and is not influenced by above the line spend on advertising.

The website figures may be influenced by changes to Google Search algorithms which can impact on the performance in search results. We can act quickly to this and in most cases counter any changes. To set the benchmark, we have taken the average organic traffic figure for the past three months, to develop an appropriate KPI, which does not include activity determined through Tourism Fund Implementation Plan.

This gives us a figure of 396,000 annual website sessions.

We would look to grow this figure by 5% a year.

- Year one 378,000 organic sessions
- Year two 397,000 organic sessions
- Year three 417,000 organic sessions

9.2.2 Social Media

With no planned spend on audience development across our social media platforms, outside of the activity determined through Tourism Fund Implementation Plan, we would look to see a modest, organic increase in fans and followers of 10% on Facebook and Instagram. Whilst we are still using X (Twitter) the platform is seeing a steady decline in users, this is reflected in our follower numbers, with our following not increasing throughout 2023. As a result, we will continue to use the platform to engage with journalists and other bodies, but will not track engagement singularly, any traffic from X will be incorporated into the organic traffic referrals from our social media platforms to the website.

To track engagement, we will continue to follow reach and profile visits on both Facebook and Instagram. Reach can be affected by ads activity, however, we would still look to see an increase of 10%.

Profile visits on both Facebook and Instagram can be likened to a website visit, so as we build our following, we would expect to see a year on year increase of profile visits of 10%.

Comparing our Facebook and Instagram profiles with that of other Norfolk and Suffolk DMOs, our aim is to remain in the top 3 accounts on both platforms, this includes Visit Great Yarmouth, Visit North Norfolk, Visit Suffolk and Visit Norfolk. Currently the only DMO on Facebook with a larger following than The Suffolk Coast is Visit Great Yarmouth and on Instagram, Visit North Norfolk and Visit Norwich.

Looking at organic traffic from social media to our website, we would expect to see a YOY increase of 10%.

10 Budget 2024 to 2027

East Suffolk Council	£ 60,667	£ 60,667	£ 60,667
Membership income	£ 37,560	£ 42,620	£ 48,375
Festival & Events Funds	£ 6,000	£ 6,180	£ 6,489
Advertising income	£ 25,000	£ 28,000	£ 32,000
Conference income	£ 7,000	£ 7,500	£ 8,500
SZC Tourism Fund income	£ 200,000	£ 200,000	£ 200,000
TOTAL INCOME	£ 336,227	£ 344,967	£ 356,031
EXPENDITURE			
Human resource	£ 93,321	£ 97,054	£ 100,936
Marketing Director 8 hours/week 0.2	£ 12,842	£ 13,356	£ 13,890
Brand Manager 24 hours/week 0.6	£ 32,987	£ 34,306	£ 35,678
Marketing Manager 28 hours/week 0.7	£ 32,048	£ 33,330	£ 34,663
Administration support 21/week 0.5	£ 15,445	£ 16,063	£ 16,705
General and Office expenses	£ 7,429	£ 7,649	£ 7,957
Insurance	£ 481	£ 495	£ 510
Accountancy	£ 2,334	£ 2,404	£ 2,476
Bank Charges	£ 124	£ 127	£ 131
Online membership payment costs (Stripe)	£ 400	£ 410	£ 500
Office costs	£ 3,090	£ 3,183	£ 3,278
Mileage	£ 500	£ 515	£ 530
Expenses	£ 500	£ 515	£ 530
Computer Equipment	£ -		£ -
Marketing Activity	£ 35,270	£ 38,879	£ 43,445
Marketing Manager 32 hours/week - content, social & ad mgt	£ -	£ -	£ -
Generic TSC digital promotion above the line	£ -	£ -	£ -
Website - hosting and development	£ 4,120	£ 4,244	£ 4,371
Consumer enews communication	£ 3,600	£ 3,800	£ 4,000
Advertising Commission	£ 6,250	£ 7,000	£ 8,000
Advertising expenditure linked to paid member campaigns	£ 10,000	£ 11,200	£ 12,800
Membership support services	£ 800	£ 1,500	£ 2,000
Conference and networking	£ 6,000	£ 6,500	£ 7,500
Festival fund grants expenses	£ 4,500	£ 4,635	£ 4,774
Imagery/assets			
SZC Project Expenditure			
Destination campaign expenditure, including DMO associated costs	£ 200,000	£ 200,000	£ 200,000
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£ 336,020	£ 343,582	£ 352,338
NET SURPLUS PROFIT	£ 207	£ 1,385	£ 3,693

NB These projections do not allow for any adjustments should the Tourism Fund Marketing Manager be integrated into the DMO e.g. creating a Marketing Director role.

Conclusion

Many thanks for reading! We know there is a lot of information here, the team are happy to answer any questions you may have. TSC is positive about the future of tourism in East Suffolk and is looking forward to the challenges ahead!