



## **The Suffolk Coast DMO - Three-year funding proposal 2021 to 2024**

To deliver the important work identified in this document, TSC requires the security of £61K funding each year from East Suffolk Council as laid out in the 3-year financial model attached. (Core and festival grant funding). Please note that the DMO is unable to give an accurate forecast of the income it will be able to generate at this current time due to the pandemic. Anecdotal evidence from our membership currently highlights there may not be an appetite to invest in paid advertising which could affect both our membership and advertising income lines.

### **1. Mission & purpose**

The Suffolk Coast DMO (TSC) was initially established in 2012 with the aim of serving its membership by providing them with new routes to markets through marketing services covering the previous Suffolk Coastal District. The remit was widened to cover the previous Waveney district in 2015 and the TSC now provides district wide marketing to the whole of East Suffolk as well as acting as a conduit for ESC (and others) to engage with the industry. The goal has always been to grow the visitor economy sustainably, by boosting tourism in the “shoulder” seasons.

However, since 2018, when the last funding agreement was put in place, TSC has grown its role exponentially despite its modest resources. Not only has TSC increased its membership and advertising income in the last three years, but the organisation has become a vital support and information channel to businesses in the visitor economy, on major issues such as national-scale construction projects and the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. TSC is a trusted authority, and has willingly taken on this additional responsibility whilst continuing with its core marketing function. TSC is also working hard to build regional tourism collaborations, to amplify our messaging and access crucial funding.

### **2. Context**

Until the pandemic crisis struck, TSC had been building its membership and advertising income impressively, whilst engaging with the issues related to the major energy developments proposed on the Suffolk coast.

Businesses in the visitor economy have been deeply affected by Covid-19, initially through months of lost trade, then by a surge of demand whilst concurrently having to adapt to the new safety guidelines and then once again finding themselves in a lockdown situation.

TSC has acted as a conduit for information, guidance and support. Initially members were unable to afford membership fees as they protected their cash, and then, paradoxically, did not require marketing effort in the summer as demand was high. Nonetheless TSC was on hand to offer support and has deepened its relationship with its members as a result.

### **3. Team**

TSC has an experienced volunteer board and a small but hugely skilled executive team.

The board contains representatives from Adnams, Snape Maltings / Britten Pears Arts, The Hotel Folk, The Yeo Group, The National Trust, Attain Solutions Ltd and AHP Consulting. The four annual board meetings are attended by officers from East Suffolk Council and Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB.

The executive team comprises Annie Willey (Brand Manager, 0.6) mainly focused on attracting and retaining paying members, Julian Evans (Marketing Director, 0.2), Beccie Amer (Marketing Manager, 0.6) responsible for all social media and overall PR, and an administrator (0.6). This totals 2.0 FTE roles.

### **4. Membership**

Annual membership fees are £110 + VAT. Whilst there is price sensitivity, we believe that prices can be increased to £115 +VAT from 22/23.

In August 2020, TSC's membership was 233, though this contained a number of businesses who had been offered subsidised membership. The cautious forecast is that membership will drop to c. 176 in 2021, before recovering to pre-Covid levels by 2023. It may be possible to improve on this, but it is a challenge to predict how the visitor economy will perform in 2021 and 2022.

### **5. Regional networking**

TSC has also devoted time and energy into fostering strong links with other neighbouring DMOs in Suffolk and Norfolk. TSC has been a powerful advocate for collaboration, which has become much more productive in recent times, in large part due to TSC's leadership. Building these relationships requires skill, patience and diplomacy.

## 6. Sources of income

The team needs to be sure of having core costs covered (c. £110K) to free it up to search for funds for impactful marketing campaigns. This is a particular challenge for TSC, as many other DMOs benefit from income from Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).

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

- East Suffolk Council's core grant funding is crucial to the viability of TSC, accounting for 53% of income in 2021/22 dropping to 49% for 2023/24.
- Membership fees, which require significant effort to manage, provides c. 20% of TSC's annual income.
- The team has worked hard to raise additional sums through advertising revenues, but this stream has been significantly affected by the pandemic.
- 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.
- TSC has plans for a new "joint campaign" model, where the DMO looks for match funding from key members.
- In the last financial year TSC was supported by a £22.8k grant from VisitEngland we are not aware of further support being available and have not incorporated it in the budgets moving forwards.

If TSC's team has robust and reliable support from ESC, it can focus on devising and running high quality, high impact campaigns (mainly digital).

## 7. Marketing Activity

A core strength of TSC is the knowledge and skills available to support marketing activity. With DMO team members that run their own businesses specialising in print and digital advertising, social media, SEO, PR, website development and content delivery. TSC is able to deliver results without engaging expensive advertising agencies.

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

Through the pandemic TSC website was one of the only websites across Suffolk and Norfolk that matched year on year audience engagement despite a reduction in above the line advertising. Over the summer period the website users increased by 43%. We will continue to engage with and increase audiences on social media platforms and subscribers.

In addition to this work we will again be the conduit to deliver the Festival and Event funding support 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.** During 2020 no festivals or events took place due to COVID-10 and the proposed financial accounts for 2021-24 similarly assumes no festival and events funding during 2021-22 because of COVID.

In 2020/2021 we saw the DMO's from across Suffolk and Norfolk combine their experience and marketing knowledge to support activity co-ordinated by Visit East of England. Each Council provides funding that previously was given to Visit Suffolk, East Suffolk Council have the joint largest contribution of £14k per annum.

In 2020/2021 this fund was given to Visit East of England by all Suffolk and Norfolk DMOs which provided a very significant budget for a campaign for the East of England. TSC provided marketing insights with weekly meetings, assets in the form of video and photography and content creation to support the Visit East of England campaign. **The support for this is covered within the core costs of TSC and will continue through in the three-year plan.**

Working together as wider regions, such as the DMO's across Suffolk and Norfolk, is a model that Visit East of England has been encouraging. This combined activity enabled Visit East of England to bid for marketing funding for VEE from Visit England. Bids have been successful and TSC along with the other DMOs has provided resource to help develop the bids, develop the campaign concepts, organise the marketing assets so that the campaign could be delivered for VEE. **Again, this support is covered within TSC core costs.**

Over the next three years we expect the visitor economy to be influenced by a number of large projects, these could provide joint marketing opportunities but cannot be incorporated firmly into a business plan:

- £24.9 million Lowestoft Town Investment Plan – TSC have engaged with East Suffolk Council to discuss the importance of a marketing proposal within the business plan.
- Felixstowe BID – approved in November 2020 they have allocated £422k per year over the next 5 years for “local visitor marketing and promotion of the town” TSC are in early discussions with the Felixstowe BID about marketing activity.
- Sizewell Cycle Path (working title) – a £1.5 million cycle project led by David Falk at SCC to form part of the SZC Tourism Mitigation Fund which has £150k planned for a three-year marketing plan.
- Introduction of “Tourism Zones”. This was an initial driver for Suffolk and Norfolk DMOs to work together. New Tourism Zones will benefit from additional funding. There is an expectation that the East of England may not be included because as a region we performed relatively well compared to other areas through the pandemic.
- Scottish Power Renewables – see below
- EDF Energy – see below

## 8. Energy Projects

TSC, in partnership with ESC, continues to engage in conversations with EDF Energy and to a lesser extent ScottishPower Renewables. If either or both of the projects are to go ahead, 'Tourism Funds' are likely to be provided to mitigate the impacts on the visitor economy, which would be substantial. In this scenario, TSC and ESC should review the three-year funding agreement.

## 9. Summary of 3-year strategy

TSC will focus on the following strategy in the following three years;

- Help tourism businesses recover after the challenges of 2020
  - Continue to provide COVID advice and guidance
  - Continue to direct tourism businesses to available financial support
  - Continue to provide excellent destination marketing services across East Suffolk
  - Work with other DMOs, Visit Suffolk etc to secure longer-term tourism support for the county and the region
- Regrow advertising and membership income.
- Work closely with strategic partner ESC to secure stable support to contribute to core costs, allowing the small team to actively seek funding for impactful campaigns.
- Stay deeply involved in discussions with ESC and the energy project developers, ready to play the major role in protecting the reputation of the area as a serene and tranquil place to visit, and to conceive new products and assets to mitigate the impacts of the projects.
- Engage with regional tourism colleagues, other Suffolk DMOs, Visit Suffolk, Visit East of England and supporting the mission to make East Anglia a Tourism Zone.
- Work with Suffolk Growth Partnership in shaping the Visitor Economy, this is linked to the recently created post - Strategic lead for the visitor economy – Suffolk Growth Partnership. Retain the strong team and provide them with additional support. Refresh the board, with a new chair and a more diverse membership.

In order to deliver this strategy, TSC requires the security of funding, as laid out in the 3-year financial model.