

15 October 2014

Business & Town Centres Committee

Visitor Website

Report of: *Anne Knight, Economic Development Manager*

Wards Affected: *All*

This report is: *Public*

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the research undertaken in relation to procuring, launching and promoting a new visitor website for Brentwood Borough.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 **To support the proposal to commission and implement the visitor website, subject to future resourcing for the on-going promotion and servicing of this website being resolved.**
- 2.2 **To agree that the final decision with regards to how this project is progressed will be determined by Council in March 2015 as part of the budget setting exercise.**

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 Following the successful workshop in March 2014 with Visit Essex and local businesses and partners, it has become evident there is a clear need for a better coordinated marketing of the visitor offer for the Borough and that a visitor website would be a powerful tool to enable this.
- 3.2 Various options and external proposals have been investigated and considered as well as the option of developing the site on the existing Council's website. However the latter is not possible due to ICT capacity and compatibility issues.
- 3.3 A proposal from Partners by Design was presented on the 11 September 2014 to the Chairman, Acting Chief Executive, Officers and the Visit Essex Chief Executive. This was well received and Partners by Design is the preferred delivery option.

- 3.4 This project would develop a bespoke visitor website for the Borough including the opportunity for businesses to be listed and advertised either free of charge or for a small fee. It would include information on key attractions, accommodation, events, transport links, location, where to eat, shop and enjoy leisure pursuits. It would have effective links to the Visit Essex and Borough Council websites. It would provide an effective and user friendly platform from which to promote the boroughs visitor offer, promote businesses and attract increased visitor spend and income.
- 3.5 The procurement of the website would be £6,000 (one-off cost), plus £195 for a refreshed Love Brentwood branding. If Partners by Design provide the editorial and maintenance support in the first year this would be £1,995.
- 3.6 The website will need to be launched effectively and promoted to ensure businesses register to it, to raise awareness amongst the visitor market and that it is used. It is recommended therefore that a number of marketing tools are procured from Partners by Design to assist with this and this would cost up to an additional £2,000 dependent on the tools agreed.
- 3.7 If the complete proposal from Partners by Design is commissioned the total cost would be £10,190, although this may be slightly negotiable. It is proposed that this would be supported by the ED budget.
- 3.8 In order to ensure the websites success is maximised it is recommended that at least part time dedicated officer resource is employed to launch, develop and promote the website and to aspire in the long-term to sell the site to businesses in order to generate revenue to offset some of the costs.
- 3.9 Unfortunately following internal discussions it seems the Council is unable to accommodate this role from within existing resources so would need to recruit and fund an additional resource in order to really “sweat” the asset and maximise the benefits from it.
- 3.10 Another option that has been considered is an offer from Visit Essex to provide a member of their staff on secondment part time basis at cost (awaiting this) for the initial 6 months of the project in order to support its launch and initial development. This option, or appointing Partners by Design or a similar agency to do this initial work would allow the Council time to recruit the necessary long-term resource for this role. It would enable us to maintain momentum for this project and launch the website before Christmas to work alongside the “Light-up Brentwood” campaign.

- 3.11 Discussions have taken place with the Acting CEO, Visit Essex and the Chair of this Committee to ascertain and recommend the best way forward. Due to the on-going resource requirement, the final decision will be deferred to Council in March 2015 to be considered as part of the budget setting process.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

- 4.1 Different visitor website providers have been investigated as well as best practice from other areas. The preferred option who meet the required brief and provide the best value for money are Partners by Design, a family run firm, who have undertaken similar work for Epping and Harlow Councils.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 The one over-riding request from the visitor economy businesses in the borough following the successful workshop with Visit Essex in March 2014 was for one co-ordinated point of offer for the visitor which could be provided by a visitor website (especially important given the demise of the Tourist Information Centre).
- 5.2 The Visitor Website would provide an effective and up to date tool and platform from which the visitor offer of the borough can be promoted to the outside world to encourage increased visitors, dwell time, spend and investment in the borough.
- 5.3 Supporting the visitor economy is a key priority in the ED Strategy.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 This project supports the delivery of the visitor economy of the Draft ED Strategy which has successfully undergone public consultation.

7. References to Corporate Plan

- 7.1 Economic Development is a key priority to support the delivery of the Corporate Plan priorities of sustainable economic development, promoting a mixed economic base across the Borough, maximising opportunities for retail and a balance night time economy. This includes:
- Facilitating the creation of new businesses
 - Assisting in the provision of advice and guidance for local businesses

- Working in partnership with the business community and support agencies
- Seeking inward investment into the Borough
- Assisting the SE LEP and Heart of Essex Partnership to secure projects and funding to benefit the Brentwood economy

8. Implications

Financial Implications

Name & Title: Jo-Anne Ireland, Acting Chief Executive

Tel & Email 01277 312712; jo-anne.ireland@brentwood.gov.uk

- 8.1 One off costs are: the procurement of the website (£6,000), the refreshed Love Brentwood branding (£195) and the marketing literature to promote the website (£2,000). If Partners by Design provide the editorial and maintenance support in the first year this would be £1,995.
- 8.2 In order to really maximise the website it is proposed that an additional resource will be necessary to support the launch, take-up, editorial and ongoing project management of the website. It is proposed that this would be a part-time resource or an apprentice (c£20,000 per annum).
- 8.3 Due to the on-going resource requirement, the final decision will need to be deferred to Council in March 2015 to be considered as part of the budget setting process.

Legal Implications

Name & Title: Christopher Potter, Monitoring Officer

Tel & Email 01277 312774; Christopher.potter@brentwood.gov.uk

- 8.4 None

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

- 8.5 None

9. Background Papers (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

- 9.1 None

10. Appendices to this report

10.1 None

Report Author Contact Details:

Name: Anne Knight

Telephone: 01277312607

E-mail: anne.knight@brentwood.gov.uk