

2 September 2015

Economic Development Committee

Brentwood Visitor and Location Website

Report of: *Gordon Glenday, Head of Planning and Development*

Wards Affected: *All*

This report is: *Public document*

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the different options researched and a recommendation for the procurement and launch of a new website to showcase the Borough as being an excellent location to visit, stay, live, work and do business.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 **To agree the commissioning and development of a Brentwood Visitor and Location Website utilising the Visit Essex Partner scheme option 2b.**
- 2.2 **To implement this under the delegated authority of the Head of Service for Planning and Development utilising £10,000 of the 2015/16 Economic Development budget**

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 An Economic Impact of Tourism Report was commissioned for Brentwood Borough in 2013 as part of the Visit Essex County report. Key volumes and values findings for Brentwood reported the total value of tourism as £160 million based on staying visitor trips, day visits and visitor related spend. This represents an important contribution to the local economy and total value of tourism to Essex County, estimated to be nearly £3 billion. Tourism related employment for Brentwood was estimated to be 2,785 persons, representing 8% of all employment in the Borough and the same 8% as the County average.

- 3.2 Supporting tourism and leisure is a key priority of the Economic Development Strategy. To address this and promote the Borough's offer, the Economic Development team worked with Visit Essex during 2014 to hold an event with businesses to consider how the Borough could be branded and marketed in the future. A successful workshop was held in March 2014 and a key request was to have one co-ordinated offer for the visitor via a visitor website, especially important given the demise of the Tourism Information Centre.
- 3.3 Discussions were held with Visit Essex and other local authorities to investigate the different options for developing a visitor website and proposals were considered including Partners by Design and New Vision Group (NVG).
- 3.4 A full report was considered at the 15 October 2014 Business and Town Centres Committee outlining the project and a range of options for developing the website. Following this it was agreed to support the development of a website subject to future resourcing for the on-going promotion and servicing of this website being resolved as part of the 2015/6 budget setting exercise.
- 3.5 The 2015/6 Economic Development Committee has since expressed an aspiration to widen the offer of the website so that it can act as a platform for businesses, visitors and residents who are interested in Brentwood's offer. This would require the commissioning of an enhanced website to showcase Brentwood as an attractive and competitive location to live, work, visit, invest and set up business. This has also been considered when scoping the options.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

- 4.1 Different visitor websites have been investigated as well as best practice from other areas. The options considered are as follows:

Option 1 – Partners by Design

- 4.2 The Partners by Design proposal was presented to the 16 December 2014 Business and Town Centres Committee. Whilst the concept and design were well received, the overall cost of the website of £9,800 did not include necessary annual editorial and maintenance support costs; had limited functionality and support and did not provide direct links to the Visit Essex website.

Option 2a - NVG Standard Partner Package

- 4.3. NVG Standard Partner Package provides a lower cost option in association with Visit Essex, of which Brentwood Borough Council is a member. Following a review and tender process, Visit Essex commissioned a new website offering greater functionality. Launched in July 2015, the site was designed by NVG who have developed a cost effective Essex partner solution. This is for local authorities to share the same fully responsive template as the Visit Essex site but allowing tailored branding for each of the respective partner organisations.
- 4.3.1 By leveraging the responsive design investment and structure of the Visit Essex website as their foundation, NVG can supply Brentwood with its own website with bespoke design and navigation at a fraction of the normal development costs. This will enable a Brentwood website that will retain its own domain, content management system, tourism data, campaign tracking, social media and brand. Key performance indicators will be provided including Google Analytics to monitor click-throughs and referrals so that performance can be measured. The Economic Development team will also work with businesses and destinations on the site to conduct surveys to analyse traffic and business originating from the website. The site is adaptable to run across a range of different devices including tablets and mobile phones.
- 4.3.3 All Visit Essex member information and updates can be transferred to the partner website so that attractions and accommodation can be included. It would be a stand alone website hosted by NVG with links to the Brentwood section of the Visit Essex website, Brentwood Borough Council's and the Renaissance Group websites as well as Visit England through Visit Essex.
- 4.3.4. NVG's Partner Package can provide a website which will ensure a platform to market Brentwood's offer to businesses as part of the site navigation at no additional cost. This could include information on:
- Key employment sites e.g. Brentwood Enterprise Park
 - Major businesses and case studies
 - Key business sectors
 - Strategic employment projects e.g. Town Centre Regeneration, Brentwood Business Incubation Hub
 - Good transport links and Crossrail
 - LDP
 - Skills and employability including Apprenticeships
 - Business support, funding and investment

- Commercial property, relocation and expansion advice

There would be links to partner websites including the Council business section (which currently does not provide this level of detail), partner organisations such as Brentwood Chamber of Commerce, the new Growth Hub and County partners including Invest Essex.

4.3.5 As part of our membership, Visit Essex has agreed to help us with launching and marketing the new website as well as offering PR support. They have also offered to host an event for local businesses to communicate the offer as a follow up to last year's initial scoping workshop at the Holiday Inn.

4.3.6 By using economies of scale developed for Visit Essex partners, NVG can host, monitor, support and maintain partner sites. This includes tourism data, universal site search, social media feeds and links and helpdesk support of partners and destinations. This option is at a cost of £9,000 for a three year contract inclusive of training and would utilise the Economic Development budget. NVG will maintain all partner data at no extra cost or resource. Any new improvements and functionalities to the Visit Essex site will be implemented across all partner websites free of charge. This option provides a considerable reduction in cost when compared to the £17,400 original quote submitted by NVG in 2014 for a stand-alone Brentwood website (not in association with Visit Essex).

Option 2b - NVG Higher Spec. Partner Package

4.4 This option would provide the same package as Option 2a with additional functionalities of extra website colours; Corporate Management System folders; Google Mapping, and Rotating Header Images, at an additional cost of £1000 for 3 years, so £10,000 in total.

Recommended option

4.5.1 The recommended option 2b delivers the brief of a visitor and location website which aligns with Visit Essex; provides hosting, support and maintenance; offers a data steward and inputting service and provides the best value for money through NVG's Visit Essex partnership offer.

4.5.2 NVG are also delivering websites for Saffron Walden, Colchester and Southend under the same partner agreement. NVG have a trusted product which has been proven to work. NVG manage 439 other websites including key destinations such as Cornwall, the New Forest and Lake District. They have multiple sites resulting in greater search rating.

- 4.5.3 The website offers a high level of security and data protection having been Information Technology compliant with Government regulations and Essex County Council's procurement process. The Visit Essex site meets the statutory and legal requirements under the Data Protection Act for security and information governance and privacy and impact assessment.
- 4.5.4 The inclusion of a business offering would provide a strong communication channel to showcase and promote the many benefits Brentwood can offer not only visitors, but potential investors. This is not currently offered by the Brentwood Borough Council website which is designed as a self serve information directory, or by County Council's business information websites which are not Brentwood specific.
- 4.5.6 Payments for the contract could be made in total on delivery of the website or split equally over three years with annual payments.
- 4.5.7 There would be the option to charge businesses for a full listing on the site, or different levels of listings, as an income generator for the Council in the future once the site has matured and is being well utilised.
- 4.5.8 Delivery would take approximately two to three months and would require a couple of months of Economic Development team input to help develop, agree the design and navigation and to populate new content for the site. After development, the Economic Development Team will work with Visit Essex to launch the website including an event, and develop and implement an on-going marketing plan.

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 offer for the visitor which could be provided by a visitor website (especially important given the demise of the Tourism Information Centre).
- 5.2 A Visitor and Location website would provide the most effective vehicle to market the whole Borough including its attractions, eateries, commercial and retail offer, enterprise projects, living and work space, talented workforce and excellent transport links. The site would cater for their different audiences and offer personal contact information for business enquiries.

5.3 The website development and promotion supports the visitor economy, business support and investment objectives of the Economic Development Strategy.

5.4 The NVG options use economies of scale to build, host, monitor, provide support and maintenance for partner sites and so offer the most cost effective option. This has been tried and tested having successfully designed the re-launched Visit Essex website with much greater functionality and their work in progress on other partner sites in the County.

6. Consultation

6.1 This project supports the Economic Development Strategy priorities of developing a stronger tourism, leisure and retail sector, economic growth, building a stronger rural economy and business competitiveness as outlined in the 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 balanced 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

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- 8.1 An allocation of up to £10,000 is requested for Option 2b. It is recommended that this is paid in 2015/6 from the ED budget unless agreement can be given by the Council for future ED budget availability to enable us to contract and expend this allocation over three financial years (2015/6, 2016/7 and 2017/8).

Legal Implications

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- 8.2 None

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

- 8.3 NVG will work with the Council's ICT team to ensure compatibility and security with the Council's IT systems.

- 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

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