

The Great Sussex Way is the local destination marketing and management organisation for the tourism economy businesses of Chichester District.

It is predominantly funded by Chichester District Council with the overarching remit to;

1. Increase footfall, both digital and physical to Chichester District businesses
2. Increase Dwell time in the area
3. Increase visitor spend
4. Civic entrepreneurship (develop additional income generating activity to supplement the public services delivered for CDC)

The Local Tourist Challenge

Blue Sail consultants recently issued a report that found ‘Sussex’ to be two Counties made up of a collection of ‘indistinct areas’.

This finding is the backdrop in which we, at The Great Sussex Way, have the challenge of effectively representing;

- ⇒ A highly diverse collection of businesses – From Goodwood to the one man coffee van at Kingsley Vale.
- ⇒ Across a geographically dispersed, semi-rural area
- ⇒ With poor connectivity.

Strategic Approach to the Local Tourist Challenge

We have broken our strategic approach into 3 stages.

Stage 1 – Learning what a Modern DMO can and should do

1. Speak to businesses across Chichester District and find out how to create an engaged community.
2. Identify activities and services that The Great Sussex Way can deliver that are directly relevant to local tourism economy businesses. If our activities are increasing local business growth, then we are engaged in the right activities.

Stage 1 is complete

1. Business membership has increased from 80 (pre-COVID) to 670 businesses.

Chichester District businesses want a single, comprehensive website that represents all the visitor experiences across Chichester District – including a clash calendar. Businesses recognise the fragmented nature of the local business offering but ALSO the fragmented nature of DMOs (The Great Sussex Way, Experience West Sussex, Sussex by the Sea, Sussex Modern, Visit Midhurst, Visit Selsey, Petworth Vision, Tourism South East). Businesses were confused as to which DMO was their local DMO and which ones required a membership fee and which ones were free. The Great Sussex Way (TGSW) decided that to maximise engagement, membership had to be free. This way we can comprehensively represent all businesses across Chichester District. This comprehensive representation is essential to consolidate our local offer and make the offering of Chichester District more accessible to the visitor

by creating a one stop shop. This comprehensive offer also increases dwell time as visitors more easily find more things to do locally.

2. Chichester businesses want;

- more customers
- The Great Sussex Way to help them access new visitors with greater reach and content than they can manage on their own. This requires a greater digital footprint. to work collaboratively with other Chichester businesses so that the collective offering attracts greater visitor numbers and longer dwell time.
- help cutting through the ‘white noise’ of a competitive tourism market by creating a one stop shop for visitors
- leadership and coordination to create a stronger identity for Chichester District and its place in West Sussex and Sussex.
- visitor data and networking opportunities.

Stage 2 – Developing the technical and practical capabilities to deliver a gold standard service

- Further increase the number and engagement of tourism businesses
- Create a data model to analyse visitor trends
- Create a data driven approach to digital marketing
- Increase the digital footprint of Chichester (driven by data insights)
- Increase the profitability of local businesses
- Develop a rate card of services so that businesses can pay for enhanced services.

Stage 2 is complete

- Our businesses are more engaged. We have the annual ‘Leaflet Exchange’ which will evolve over the next few years (shaped by business feedback) to reflect a more modern approach to marketing. With regular business collaboration, TGSW now organise competitions, monthly deals, itineraries, press trips, Fam trips and group travel itineraries.
- We now use anonymised GPS data so we know who is coming into our district, where they are going and where they come from. This is giving us granular insights into our area. We distributed our first Tourism Business Report to share these insights with our businesses. This approach is now being adopted by Visit England.
- We use Google data, and it’s search partners to identify what search terms our potential visitors are using at different times of the year so that we can match consumer demand with business offering. This is driving up our newsletter data base, opening rates (65% - significantly higher than industry standard of 35%) and referral rates.
- Regular meetings with Gary Shipton at Sussex O to cross reference our data findings with his sources so that we are responsive to waxing and waning public trends eg Dog friendly, sustainable travel, affordable family holidays.
- We have the operational capacity to monitor impressions and tweak meta data to capture a greater market share of traffic to strong effect.
- We completed a website upgrade to improve website traffic which we expect to start rising over the next 12 months.
- We raised £23k delivering rate card services.

Most importantly, our activities are delivering profitability to businesses.

To quote Chichester Festival Theatre; *'I'm happy to say we have been able to look at the referrals and can see 647 referrals bringing in just under £3,000 of ticket sales. TGSW is our highest referrer of tourism websites.'*

Ashling Park's "reasons for booking" consistently quote the press generated specifically from TGSW press trip.

Blackdown Ridge sold out of all of their red wine after our press trip.

Sky Television approached us and have just completed a pilot project involving our vineyards.

Fishbourne Roman Place; 'Thank you for making our Roman Army Week the most successful it has ever been'

Stage 3 – Post transformation – Finding an effective operational rhythm to make Chichester District a stand out visitor destination

- Increase digital footprint of Chichester District
- Regular and effective social media presence (matching visitor appetite with local content in a way that includes a greater number of local business – through itineraries, round ups and competitions). Increased website traffic with regular SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) driven content. Regular Press coverage
- Active engagement between TGSW and businesses across the district facilitating regular quarterly networking and continued regular collaboration
- Working with stakeholders to create an identity for Chichester City and Chichester District that is more accessible to the visitor
- Regular delivery of services from TGSW rate card without detracting from the public service delivery to CDC.

Stage 3

This regular rhythm of delivery, post transformation, will be the focus of 2023.

Regarding the development of a local identity, there are 3 pervading themes that set our district apart;

1. Chichester – the Wine Capital of England

The Blue Sail consultants engage by Sussex Modern, have identified that Wine production in the UK is a £17.3 bn industry and 25% of production is in Sussex. Only 23% of the 140 vineyards in the UK have a visitor experience.

In Chichester District we have a good concentration of visitor friendly vineyards. I have spoken to Wine GB who acknowledge that Chichester is well positioned to develop into 'The Wine Capital of England'. Originally the proposal was for Chichester to be the 'Sparkling Wine Capital of Sussex', but with global warming, our vineyards would prefer to keep the option open of moving into still wine (which favours a warmer climate). Also, our vineyards express an ambition to be recognised nationally rather than just at a County level. TGSW look forward to seeing how, collectively, with CDC and local business we might take advantage of this opportunity. Hand and glove with this offering will be our local food and drink.

2. **'Outstanding Culture in Outstanding Countyside'**

TGSW would like to create an identity for Chichester as the place to experience theatre and galleries that rival London, in the setting of our magnificent countryside.

3. **The Green Destination**

whether the visitor motivation is a desire for green, sustainable tourism or cost efficient use of oil, there is the commercial impetus to create a strong identity as an environmentally friendly place to go.

The service level agreement with CDC specifically requires TGSW to;

- Developing a product portfolio for the district and seasonal campaigns
- Increasing the prominence of accommodation options – through itineraries
- Increase networking between businesses
- Developing additional income generating activities
- Improve digital footprint for Chichester District with an increase in 10% across all social media platforms. Website traffic will improve over the next 12 months after technical upgrade.
- Reporting requirements

All service level agreement targets have been met

Partnerships of Value

Over the last reporting period there have been discussions about the focus of the GSW funds from CDC to only support businesses within the geographical area of the District. Whilst TGSW understands this requirement it believes wider collaboration is needed in order to ensure maximum value for those within the District. In order to avoid confusion over the use of publicly granted funds, TGSW has actively sought external funding in order to support and engage these related businesses. TGSW is sensitive to the presentational element of this approach but based on the comments below the value to CDC is far greater with the inclusion of select tourist business partners.

For example;

1. TGSW includes some vineyards outside the geographic boundaries of CDC where they add to our local offering. For example, Wiston, Nytimber and Sugrue have a strong national reputation and when combined with Ashling Park, Tinwood and Roebuck Estate, create a critical mass at which Chichester City can be an epicentre.

2. Another area that we work with in collaboration regularly is Arundel. The online google searches for Arundel and Chichester fit a very similar profile. By including some Arundel content on our website, we can potentially capture an additional 60k searches a month. The combined volume of searches for 'Arundel' and 'Thing to do in Arundel' monthly, is on average, greater than 'Chichester', 'Things to do in Chichester', 'Goodwood' and 'Chichester Festival Theatre' combined. It is of great benefit to the Digital Footprint of Chichester District, to have selective content for Arundel on The Great Sussex Way Website.

It may be sensible and necessary to have a wider debate about how to differentiate direct investment by CDC into TGSW and the very real commercial need for a more nuanced approach to building appropriate partnerships which add value to all local tourism businesses within our physical geographical boundaries.

Summary

Thanks to the ongoing support of Chichester District Council, The Great Sussex Way is now delivering a professional, targeted and effected service to the tourism businesses of Chichester District.

Our services are directly and demonstrably, increasing the profitability of Chichester businesses. TGSW has been through a period of transformation to modernise the marketing and technical capabilities of our organisation. Having completed stages one and two above it leaves us in the strong position to focus on stage three.

This will put us in the position to realise the ambition to be the best performing DMO nationally for our size and funding by late 2024.