

2/07/2017

Dear Mr. Thrussell

The Visitor Economy – Report to Cabinet on February 7th

Thank you for providing Visit Chichester, the Council's approved Destination Management Organisation (DMO), with the opportunity to comment on the report and the proposals contained therein. The Board have met and considered the proposals and are excited about the renewed commitment from the District Council and fresh initiative of the BID organisation to support the visitor economy in our area.

Since the District Council ceased to provide any on-going financial support to the sector, Visit Chichester has continued to promote the visitor economy which we recognise as so important to our District. Out of necessity Visit Chichester's work has focussed on marketing and developing market leading web and social media platforms as well as continued engagement with the sector. The value of this effort, including the value of expert volunteer input, should not be under-estimated, and is likely to exceed the value of the welcome boost to finances proposed in the report. Moreover, the Visit Chichester brand has a commercial value in its own right, including the existing domain name. Visit Chichester notes that the value of this work is recognised (see paras 4.7 and 4.8 of the Cabinet report).

Visit Chichester agrees with the outcomes set out in the report and that the District requires a properly supported organisation performing the widest range of functions typical of a fully functioning DMO as set out in para 6 of the Cabinet's report. Visit Chichester also accepts the offer of further discussions to enable it to grow and take on these functions. It also accepts that in order to do so it will need to change principally, expanding the functions it performs and the make-up of the Board to ensure effective private sector leadership. Visit Chichester is willing to work as an equal partner with the Council and the BID organisation to make this happen and ensure a smooth transition and return to full DMO status.

In providing this commitment Visit Chichester would like to make the following further comments:

1. Confirmation that, assuming agreement can be reached on the SLA proposed within the report, Visit Chichester is taking on business, transforming itself and not being taken over. It is imperative that Visit Chichester works with clear and recognised autonomy within the context of any agreed SLA with CDC and the BID. Quite simply there needs to be trust in order for this agreement to prove successful in the long-term, and CDC and BID engagement will be represented through the Visit Chichester Board.

2. The arrangement envisaged must be reciprocal i.e. a partnership that supports the DMO to grow and become even more effective. Visit Chichester hopes that this can be achieved in a spirit of collaboration and collegiality.
3. The pace at which Visit Chichester is able to grow and perform the additional functions required of a DMO, will depend largely on the success of the newly invigorated organisation to attract new finance. Targets identified by CDC and the BID are ambitious, and whilst attainable, there is a clear need to establish a defined transition period and clear time frames to allow for consultation with the industry as part of the process. Change will not happen overnight, and it would seem sensible envisage a three year period by which point a fully functional DMO has been re-established. The appointment of key staff to help drive this process forward in the short-term will be critical, as the Board will not have the time and resource to do this to the level required. Timeframes and deliverables need to be agreed and be reflected in the SLA. There is a need to recognise the importance of re-establishing trust among local tourism providers, and it is important that going forward we have their engagement and support.
4. Any SLA must also be based around a clear and realistic mapping of areas of responsibility that lie between the respective stakeholders e.g. WSCC, CDC, BID and City Council. At the moment the overall responsibility for the visitor economy is quite disparate. This is of course an area of discussion going forward, and one that would underpin the development of a new Destination Management Plan. It is however, central to any delivery targets identified in the SLA.
5. Visit Chichester are concerned regarding the wording of para 6.7 of the report which reads:

“As part of this project, there are a number of other activities in the short-term which will be undertaken by Council officers and the BID to support the development of the DMO, including identifying and engaging with potential chairpersons, board members and funding partners; identifying (and developing) potential funding streams; developing outline objectives; initial industry engagement; and preparation of the timetable for implementation. In addition, the Council and the BID wish to be part of the recruitment process for the new chief executive.”

This is not the way that Visit Chichester envisages an equal partnership commencing. It is absolutely vital that if the proposals are to succeed that these actions are progressed in close partnership with Visit Chichester to ensure a smooth transition, don't confuse or marginalise our existing customer base, and capitalise on the existing expertise that is present within the existing Board membership. Equally, CDC and the BID must recognise and respect the constitution of Visit Chichester, particularly around Board members and voting for a new Chairman. We welcome very early discussions on this aspect so that the combined talents that exist within the proposed partnership can be put to best use for the benefit of the sector that Visit Chichester serves.

6. Overall this is a very positive story for the District however it is also important that over the coming months external communication is handled carefully and transparently. To this end, Visit Chichester would ask that any press releases or additional forms of communication are produced in consultation with all parties. Ideally, Visit Chichester becomes the main contact point for communications regarding the transition process.

We would be grateful if this letter could be brought to the attention of Cabinet, and all Councillors, before they meet and we will be happy to address Cabinet to answer any further questions that they might have if required.

Finally, we repeat our commitment to future positive engagement with both the District Council and the BID to progress this important and key development in support of the visitor.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Clegg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot at the end.

Dr Andy Clegg

Chairman of Visit Chichester

cc. Diane Shepherd, Jane Hotchkiss and Steve Oates, Colin Hicks (BID Company),