



Mr Andy Booth
Chairman,
Visitor Economy Short Focused Inquiry

Sessions House
County Hall
Maidstone
Kent ME14 1XZ

Tel: 03000 415884

By email

Date: 20th January 2021

Dear Mr Booth,

The Visitor Economy Short Focused Inquiry (SFI) Report

Thank you and your committee for producing an excellent Short Focussed Inquiry Report into the Visitor Economy in Kent.

The report provides a positive set of well-considered recommendations that will make a significant contribution to the shaping of KCC's actions to help Kent's hospitality and tourism sector. Taking the groups of recommendations in turn:

Promotion and Marketing: Recommendations 1,2, 3, 4, and 5

All these recommendations can be accepted in principle. KCC already looks for opportunities to reinforce the message that Kent is a world-beating visitor destination, and we shall be discussing these recommendations with Visit Kent

We can particularly welcome the Committee's support for Kent's international relations, and we will share the Committee's findings with the Straits Committee; the new, voluntary partnership that Kent County Council has created with neighbouring authorities from Zeeland in the Netherlands, East and West Flanders in Belgium, the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais departments of France.

A Straits tourism working group, bringing together the area's destination management organisations, is already exploring creating new cross-Channel cycling trails, and we shall also suggest marathons along the lines suggested by your committee. I am also pleased that KCC is supporting Visit Kent and the North Downs AONB in "Experience Kent" a project funded by Interreg EU funding until 2023 that seeks to encourage experiential tourism in Kent and northern France, with an emphasis on cycling and walking. Discussions between Visit Kent, Cycling UK and EU colleagues have already started.

More generally, tourism recovery was identified as a priority at the inaugural meeting of the Straits Committee in the Spring of 2020, and a cross-Channel working group was set up to explore where closer working could support recovery. The Committee is now developing a package that will include a focus on rebuilding cross-Channel travel once Covid-related restrictions are lifted.

Kent's heritage, natural and coastal assets will place us at an advantage, as emerging travel trends suggest visitors will increasingly favour nearby destinations where they can be active and feel safe and well. Kent has much to offer.

The Scrutiny Committee's report notes the importance of educational tourism. Again, the Straits tourism working group is considering measures to relaunch educational tourism as soon as the health situation allows.

Advisory and Financial Support: Recommendation 6

Since the outbreak of the crisis Kent County Council has worked hard to support the visitor economy and quickly put in place measures to support businesses seeking help. We have funded the Covid-19 Business Helpline which was launched last March and run by Kent Chamber of Commerce: it has taken over 13,000 calls with the largest number coming from businesses in the hospitality and leisure sector.

The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership highlighted the needs of the sector in its Economic Renewal and Resilience Plan and the County Council with its District and Borough partners have put in place a range of measures to help.

To supplement the Government's announcements of loans, business rates relief, and tourism and hospitality grants, Kent County Council offered its own interest-free loans to eligible small businesses. This has meant that tourism businesses across Kent have been eligible to apply for loans with a zero percent interest rate from the Kent and Medway Business Fund (KMBF). Details of an extended offer of interest-free loans will be published on the Kent County Council website later this month.

The Tourism Sector Deal: Recommendation 7

Visit Kent is continuing to pursue the possibility of establishing a tourism Sector deal for Kent, and KCC supports this.

Open Spaces, High Street and Transport: Recommendations 8 and 9

The Government has confirmed financial grants for Dover and Ramsgate and, at the invitation of MHCLG and with KCC's support, Margate has submitted a bid for £29 million for a Town Deal. KCC will also continue to discuss environmental sustainability with transport providers, AONBs and tourism businesses.

Skilled Workforce and Training: Recommendations 10 and 11

The Employment Task Force is addressing the issues raised in recommendation 10, and Locate in Kent is working alongside Visit Kent with a "destination pitch" that focuses on the

quality of life the county offers those seeking to invest in Kent or relocate their businesses here.

I thank you again for your insight into this challenging issue for the Kent's hospitality sector, which is an important and vital part of the Kent economy. I hope the response above reassures you that KCC is, and will continue to do, what it can to assist.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Mike Whiting".

Mike Whiting

Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Kent County Council