

27 August 2024



### **INTRODUCTION:**

In March 2024 **Clacton Coastal Tourism Group** was formed; we the members are made up of local businesses, community groups, trusts, and the district council - all members hold a direct interest and involvement in the success of the town's tourism offer.

We are grateful to the council's leadership who were responsible for initially promoting the idea of the group to the tourism stake holders. We are pleased to report that we currently have representatives from the following organisations:

- Billy Ball – Clacton Pier **(Chairman)**
- Jon Rowe – Clacton Pier **(Secretary)**
- Billy Peak – Clacton Pavilion & Magic City
- Penny Smith – Hastys Adventure Farm & Millers Barn Golf Park
- Mark Broad – Greensward Café
- Norman Jacobs – West Cliff Theatre & Clacton and District History Society
- Rosie Georgiou – Clacton Creatives
- Surya Hotels – The Kingscliff & Tom Peppers
- Cllr Ivan Henderson – TDC's Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Economic Growth
- Mike Carran – TDC's Assistant Director Economic Growth & Leisure
- Jane Stewart – Community Rail Partnership

Our group's aim is to work together to identify, and where possible address, the positives and negatives surrounding the Tourism offer in Clacton. We as a group seek to promote and further regenerate tourism within our town. This will include raising the profile of our attractions, accommodation, natural environment and heritage for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.

### **TOURISM AT THE HEART OF OUR TOWN:**

The benefits of tourism to the town and district are far reaching, and we have recognised some of these below:

1. **Economic Impact**
  - **Revenue Generation:** Tourism brings in substantial revenue through spending on accommodation, dining, attractions, and shopping. In fact, the sector is worth almost £402 million to the Tendring District. This influx of money supports local businesses and contributes to the local economy.
  - **Local Businesses:** Many of Clacton's businesses, such as caravan parks, amusements, restaurants, cafes, and visitor attractions, rely heavily on tourists. The seasonal nature

of tourism means these businesses often depend on peak tourist periods for their financial survival.

## 2. Employment Opportunities

- **Job Creation:** Tourism creates a wide range of jobs, from direct employment in hotels and attractions to indirect jobs in retail, transportation, and service industries. This is especially crucial in smaller towns like Clacton, where tourism is a major employer. To support this statement, it is important to recognise that the industry is responsible for almost 9000 jobs in Tendring, which is equivalent to 17.9% of the areas employment.
- **Seasonal Work:** Tourism also offers seasonal employment opportunities, often providing first jobs for students, and employment options for temporary workers during peak times and acting as a gateway to further employment.

## 3. Cultural and Social Benefits

- **Preservation of Heritage:** Tourism encourages the preservation of historic assets, culture, and tradition, as tourists often seek authentic nostalgic experiences. Clacton-on-Sea has a rich seaside heritage, and maintaining this is key to attracting visitors who in turn have supported the regeneration of local assets like, the West Cliff Theatre, Pavilion, Pier and others.
- **Community Engagement:** Events and attractions driven by tourism, such as the Clacton Airshow and Seafront Fireworks, foster a sense of community pride and provide entertainment for both visitors and locals alike.

## 4. Infrastructure Development

- **Improvement of Local Amenities:** The need to cater to tourists often leads to improvements in local infrastructure, such as better roads, public transport, and recreational facilities such as our beaches, which also benefit local residents.
- **Investment in Attractions:** Tourism motivates investment in local attractions, like Clacton Pier, Pavilion, Theatres, Farm Parks, and other attractions which not only draws visitors but also enhances the town's overall appeal.

## 5. Environmental Considerations

- **Conservation Efforts:** To maintain its appeal as a tourist destination, Clacton needs to preserve its natural environment, including its beaches and coastal areas. Tourism can incentivise environmental conservation and sustainable practices.
- **Education:** Many of our local attractions even seek to educate visitors about environmental matters, hosting school trips and the like.

## 6. Further promoting the Town's Image

- **Visibility and Recognition:** Tourism raises the profile of Clacton-on-Sea, attracting media attention and promoting the town as a desirable destination. This can lead to increased investment and further opportunities for growth.
- **Lasting legacy's:** The feel-good factor, a product of days out and making memories leaves a positive legacy which often counteracts possible negative perceptions of the town.

Overall, tourism is integral to Clacton-on-Sea's identity and economy, helping sustain its community and ensuring the town's continued prosperity.

## **TIME FOR ACTION:**

Since the formation of the CCTG, we have met on three occasions to discuss and identify the opportunities and challenges before us. In doing so we have to accept that we are not the first group to have come together with the aim of improving tourism in the town and wider district.

Many of us have experience of some of the historic local working groups that set out with good intention but amounted to little. We share frustrations expressed by local residents & seasonal visitors who remember the town in its heyday and when it was clean, tidy, well-kept and vibrant.

We have joined this group and given up our time to try and make a difference. We will work together as partners, and where possible seek to deliver positive improvements via our collaboration. In instances where the group identifies issues and challenges beyond our control, we will aim to communicate these to our partners in the public sector and will offer our time and experience in suggesting possible solutions.

Ultimately, we the members share a passion for our town and its future. The willingness from members of this group to work together stems from a common interest in wanting to see local tourism continue its journey of progression and regeneration. In particular we recognise and agree with the local authority's tourism strategy, that we must work to:

1. Increase visitor numbers – day trip & staying over
2. Increase the economic benefit / spend per head
3. Improve the profile and perception via, PR, online presence, social media and a successful marketing strategy.
4. Continually improve the visitor offer

## **THE CHALLENGES:**

At our initial meetings we recognized the importance of stirring up passion for, and pride in our town and the many assets we have to offer. We understand the challenges being faced to turn around the image of the town to become a place where people of all kinds can feel welcomed and have fun (relax) in an environment that is a clean, tidy, safe, easily accessible and convenient for them to enjoy their time with family and friends.

We recognize that passion alone will not achieve all the changes that we believe are necessary and we are aware that funding is often the biggest challenge in delivering change. We hope that the Clacton Town Board will consider the suggestions that this group makes when making recommendations to government funding partners.

We the CCTG wish to identify the areas listed below as those most critical to the sustainability and ongoing success of not only the towns tourism industry, but to the local community as a whole:

- Town centre presentation – ensure the town is **clean, tidy and maintained**
- Vacant stores and shop fronts - address issues of **empty** but once loved **premises**
- Marketing & branding of Clacton the town, attractions and events - **cohesive marketing**

- Town centre information – **signage and advertising strategy** in the town and seafront
- Tourism data – **provision of data to identify trends**, bed space, visitor numbers etc.
- Accommodation – data on **current stock**, support for **increase in quality bed numbers**
- Parking - accessible & convenient with **enough parking for locals & visitors**

### Town centre presentation – TLC Team

There is an urgent need to pay attention to the appearance and maintenance of our town centre and address some of the anti-social behaviours it attracts.

We would like to recommend the creation of a focused team of people that would be dedicated to maintaining the appearance of the town centre. They would make a positive impact on cleanliness and presentation being readily recognised by public and businesses with the ability and resources to deal swiftly with emerging issues such as littering, graffiti, fly posting and repair / maintenance of street furniture and lighting.

As a presence in the town centre the team would also be in a position to report and impact on antisocial behaviours such as street drinking, gang gatherings and loitering that affect people feeling safe and welcomed in the town.

We suggest the creation and funding of the town centre TLC Team (The Loving Clacton Team) would be a meaningful and constructive use of levelling up funding (or similar), providing employment and with possibility to extend the role to include funding and activities within in the Governments Anti -Social Behaviour Action Plan.

### Vacant stores and shop fronts

Vacant stores are prolific in the town, and we understand the regeneration of the town centre is an ongoing challenge. We support the local authority's engagement with freeholders to achieve this. In the meantime, we believe the appearance of these premises creates a depressed image rather than a buoyant / vibrant commercial area. This undoubtedly impacts on marketing the town. We understand that funding may be available to improve shop fronts.

We would like to recommend that these shop fronts could be 'wrapped' with images displaying Clacton's community, its many attractions, heritage locations and natural resources.

We would like to suggest the local community – schools, colleges, photographers etc. are engaged in developing the content for the wraps so further promoting ownership and pride in the town.

The wraps could include a QR code, which when scanned would link users to a 'You are here' style map. It could give information about the images displayed on the shop fronts with details about the locations of the images and directions to these areas as well as nearby attractions and amenities.

### Marketing and branding of Clacton the town, attractions and events

At present there appears to be no visible focused marketing of Clacton that attracts visitors nor gives them or residents current / comprehensive information about upcoming events and what they can find in the area.

The CCTG has applied via Tendring Shared Prosperity Fund for funding to develop a dedicated website that is well-managed, attractive and accessible. The funding if agreed will not only develop but help maintain the website to ensure content that is current and of good quality.

We propose that the website is controlled by the Clacton Coastal Tourism Group with local businesses, organisations and event co-ordinators being able to request promotion space.

It is proposed that if funding is made available, we would engage local colleges to identify tourism student support to maintain and populate the website so providing both a vital local source of information whilst also providing a learning opportunity.

### Town centre information

When visitors arrive at the town they would benefit from improved information.

We propose the installation of quality digital info and advertising points at key locations; ideally at entry points to the town such as outside the rail station and on the triangle on the esplanade. These will provide dynamic street-based advertising opportunities and negate the need for unsightly hard copy posters and flyers so bringing some control and co-ordination of this activity.

In addition, we would propose street-based signage / information boards mounted on streetlighting and other street furniture.

### Local tourism data

We need current and accurate underpinning data to better inform discussion and decision-making in support of planning for tourism in Clacton. This must be based on credible evidence of current resources, projected needs and emerging trend. Commissioning reports in these areas, or at the very least, accurately updating the information currently held would help inform decisions for the future.

Whilst there is a need for comprehensive data, there are of course some headline elements of data that are crucial to better understanding the tourism drivers. These should include, annual visitors number, demographic, transportation choices, dwell time, day trip numbers, overnight stays, accommodation and parking strategy. The latter of which are significantly important enough to warrant their own sections below.

### Accommodation

There is a need to profile the quality, quantity and type of holiday accommodation in the town and surrounding area. This should reflect not only the 'traditional' bedspace but also those

available through emerging trends in private letting of property, and the use of campervans, and glamping sites etc.

Considering overnight stays amount to only 10% of the visitors to the district and yet these contribute half of the income relating to tourism, it seems logical that this is an area that should be supported for growth. Particularly as we would only need to grow the overnight visitor numbers by a modest amount to see significant economic benefit.

This could be achieved with positive application of existing planning policies and actively supporting proposals from quality operators who seek to invest on our district. Significant benefits have been recognised in seaside towns such as Blackpool, where marked improvements have been made in the accommodation offering. This has led to an increase of year-round functions, events and conferences, bringing more people to the respective towns out of season than ever before. In a number of cases resulting in more permanent jobs in place of the historic seasonal alternative.

### Parking

We encourage an urgent review of parking strategy to benchmark current availability and usage. This should include the location of parking spaces that serve the town centre and seafront – the convenience of parking and traffic flow is critical to reviving use of the town centre and visits to tourist attractions.

The consensus between attraction operators is that the current number of parking spaces is inadequate for peak periods and the parking data will be key in informing suggestions for improvements. With the ultimate aim to inform the parking strategy as we move forward.

### **COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER:**

Clearly there is much to do to see our town and tourism prosper in the way that we truly believe it can. There are challenges, but there are also opportunities. For the first time in many years, it feels as though Clacton's voice is getting stronger, we have a group of like-minded passionate people, who are committed to doing their bit for our sector.

What we hope is that this collaboration is infectious and the members of our wider community are driven to support our efforts and do their bit to help promote **Progress, Passion and Pride** in their respective sectors.

Clacton was built as a seaside resort town, and it has always been in the premier league of such towns throughout the UK, let's work together to return it to the top of that division.



Signed;

Billy Ball, Chairman – for and on behalf of **Clacton Coastal Tourism Group**.