

Report of	Assistant Director of Communities	Author	Claire Taylor
Title	Review of tourism marketing and the tourism experience		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1. Executive Summary

1.1 The report and accompanying presentation (Appendix A) will cover:

- Core tourism services
- Tourism Campaign 2016-2018
- Tourism statistics and trends
- Benchmarking/comparisons with the approach of other destinations to tourism marketing
- Supporting the tourism experience
- Working in partnership
- The future

2. Action Required

2.1 The Panel is invited to review the work of the Council in marketing the Borough of Colchester to visitors, the current marketing campaign, and the Council's wider role in delivering the tourism experience.

2.2 The Panel is also invited to make any recommendations to the Portfolio Holder for Business and Culture regarding this activity.

3. Reason for Scrutiny

3.1 The Panel has agreed to undertake this review at the request of Councillor Laws.

4. Background Information

4.1 Tourism and the Visitor Economy is identified as a priority sector in the Council's Economic Growth Strategy 2015-2021.

The following summarises dedicated tourism services currently funded by the Council to support the visitor economy across the Borough:

- An information service consisting of the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) located in Hollytrees Museum in Castle Park, where staff man the Museum as well as provide the information service, gift shop and a booking service for guided tours of the town centre and some local events; the Borough's destination website www.visitcolchester.com and the Visit Colchester social media accounts on Twitter, Face Book and Instagram, all of which are maintained by the VIC team.
- An annual budget of approximately £25K (estimate for 2018/19) held by CBC's Communications and Marketing Team for tourism marketing. This is supported by Business Partner staffing resource and access to the wider Communications team expertise (press, design etc). The Communications Team works closely with the VIC to maximise resources. The funding delivers: the annual Colchester Visitor Guide (15K print run) and Discover Colchester DL Mini Guide (80K print run) both designed in house, and an extensive distribution contract for each; attendance at Excursions, the annual major one day group travel trade exhibition, and a small sum for social media boosting.

Together these service elements operate under the brand of 'Visit Colchester'.

In addition:

- Visit Essex funding: Colchester Borough Council contributes to Essex County Council's Visit England recognised Destination Management Organisation (DMO), through district membership (£2900 in 17/18) and group membership for CBC owned visitor attractions and facilities (£2500 in 17/18).
- Marketing is also undertaken for a range of other CBC services which relates to and benefits the visitor economy. Often this is venue specific and not channelled through Visit Colchester, but there is a co-ordinated approach with the aim of promoting Colchester as a whole.

4.2 Tourism Campaign 2016-2018

In 2016 in support of the recognition of the importance of tourism and heritage within the Strategic Plan, Cabinet allocated one off funds of £100K from the New Homes Bonus to fund an additional temporary Business Partner resource and a dedicated tourism campaign. A further £70K was provided for the continuation of the campaign in 2017. It is anticipated it will conclude in June 2018 when all additional funding will have been deployed. The Leadership and PFH in particular understand the need to build upon the momentum generated, and there is a very keen desire to continue this work, but this has to be balanced with a very demanding financial climate.

The campaign has been delivered by the Communications and Marketing Team in collaboration with the VIC, the Assistant Director of Communities and colleagues from other related services. Regular updates have been supplied to the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Business and to the Council's Senior Management and Leadership Teams.

Due to the highly visual nature of the subject extensive further information on the aims, themes and execution of the campaign is contained within the accompanying presentation (Appendix A).

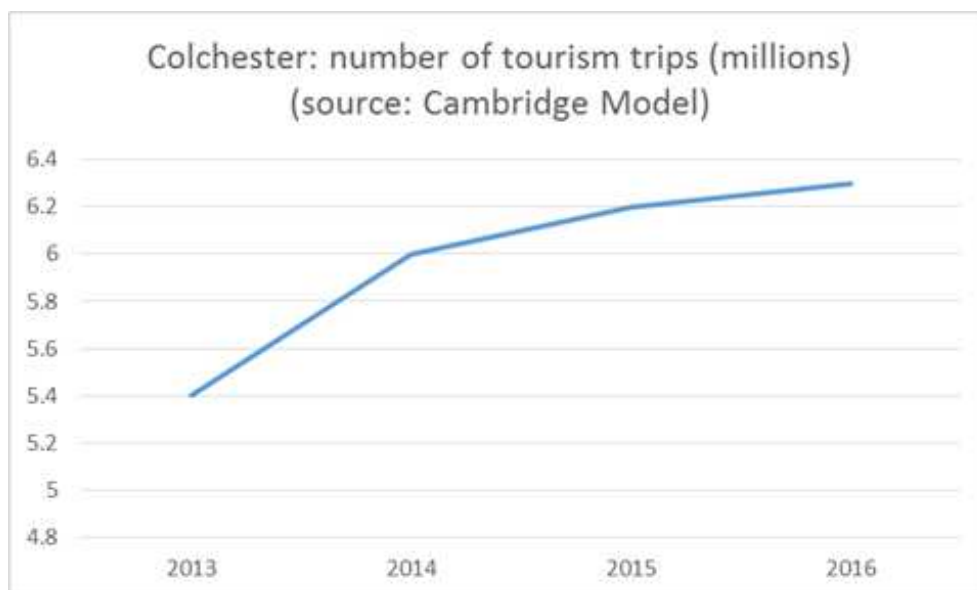
4.3 Tourism statistics and trends

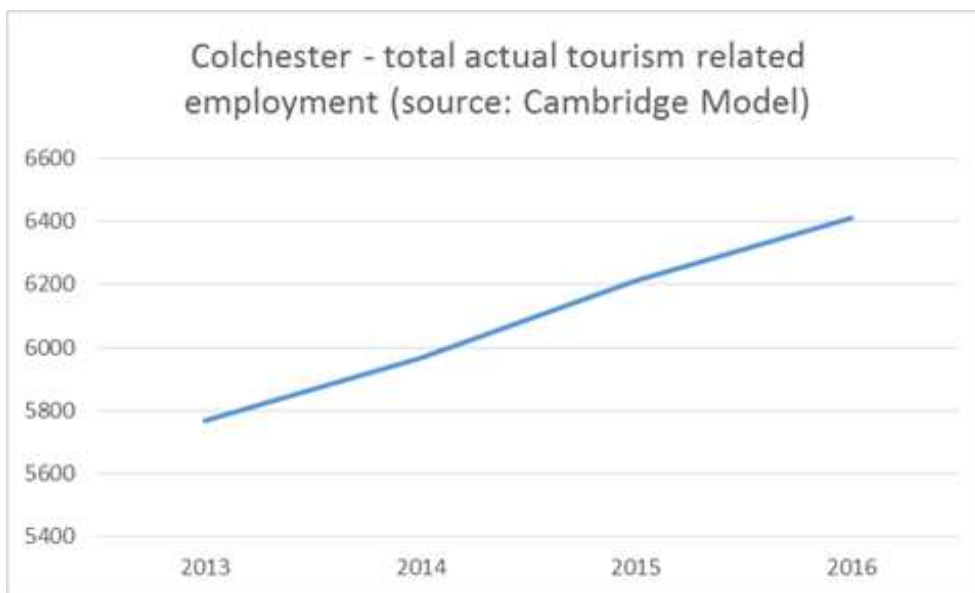
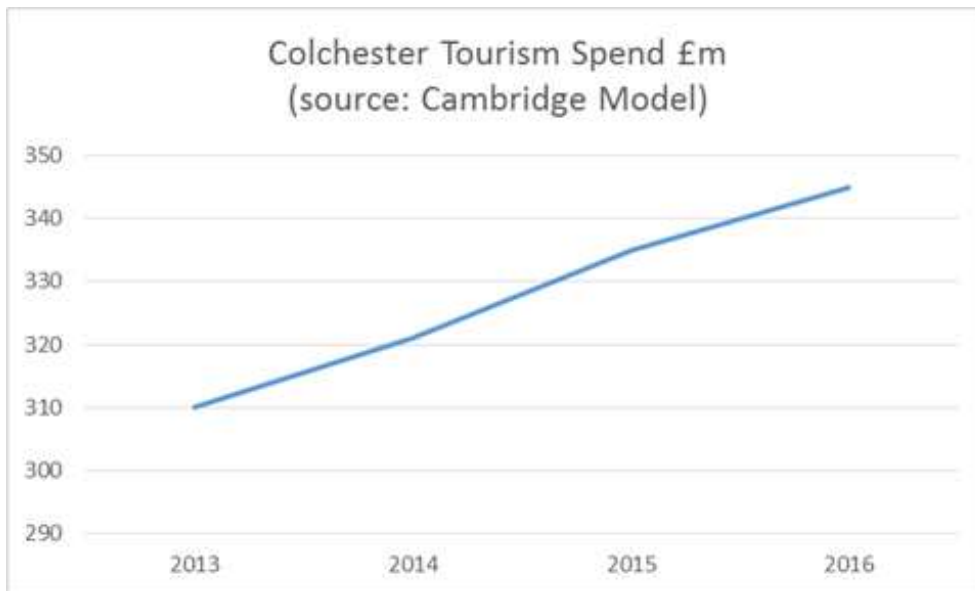
As with most performance analysis we use a mix of quantitative and qualitative information and trends. We also feel it is important to consider what the industry is telling us including around levels of investment in local hotels, visitor attractions and restaurants; and the public through social media and websites like Trip Advisor.

Colchester Borough Council currently receives an annual Economic Impact of Tourism (volume and value) report through District Membership of Visit Essex. The latest report available for 2016 is attached as Appendix B. The report is compiled using the industry recognised Cambridge Model – the methodology for which is explained in Appendix B. The Cambridge Model is widely used across England outside of Essex including councils across East Anglia, the South East and South West and Midlands and high profile visitor destinations such as Cambridge, Oxford, Canterbury and Bristol.

Through the information contained in this report the Council monitors the high level trend in the number of visitor trips and the value of tourism to the Borough of Colchester, in terms of contribution to the economy, the number of jobs supported and other measures. This assists in the formation of marketing objectives such as encouraging short break activity, which converts day trips into more lucrative overnight stays.

The following charts show the trend for the last 4 years available demonstrating an improvement in key performance indicators across that period:



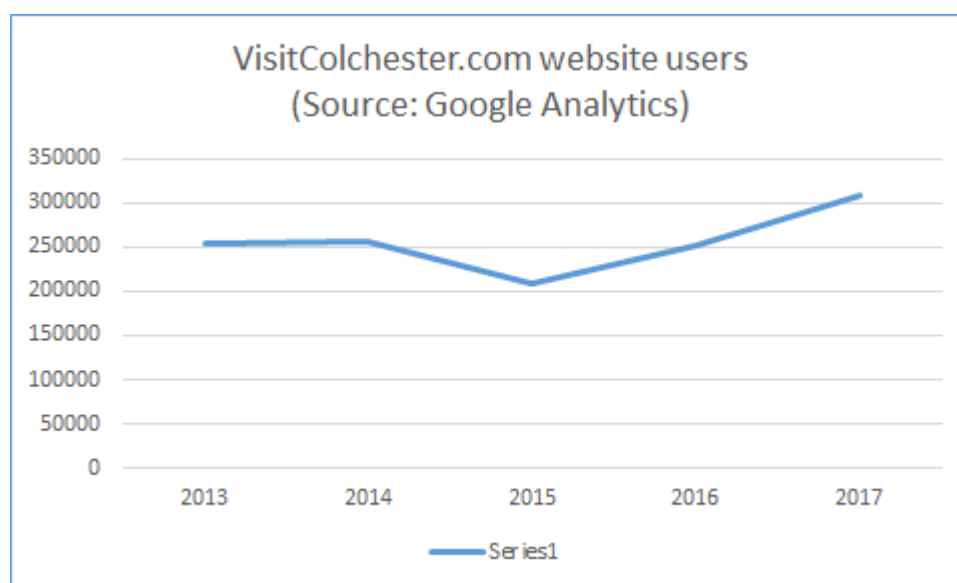


It should be noted there are many external factors impacting on local tourism performance which are outside of the Council's control: the health of the economy; the weather; major events such as terrorist attacks; existing perceptions; the regional context etc. However, we would expect the additional marketing effort to deliver further improvements to the figures over time, although there may be a lag between the execution of the campaign and the impact coming through in the statistics and longer term trends.

Website and social media engagement is also monitored and targets for improvement built into staff objectives. These platforms have a role in marketing, but are also tools for providing information to and communicating with visitors in advance and during their stay, and are resources utilised by many residents. The graph overleaf shows the trend in unique users of the www.visitcolchester.com website.

Following a dip in 2015 the website was redesigned and underwent intensive search engine optimisation, and supported by the current campaign has seen a steady increase in users over the last two years, up 22% in the last year alone.

The VIC team constantly renew and update content and over 60 different organisations and businesses have direct access to the website to upload their own information and events. The website has over 30 advertisers making the site financially sustainable.



4.4 Working in Partnership

The Council actively seeks to work with public and private sector partners to promote the Borough of Colchester as a visitor destination. This maximises resources and amplifies and extends the reach of the promotional message. Key partners include the regional Destination Management Organisation (DMO) Visit Essex of which Colchester is a District member, and the national tourism body Visit England; major stakeholders within the town such as University of Essex and the Army; bodies such as the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the Colchester Tour Guides Association and Parish and Town Councils.

As referenced in the accompanying presentation (Appendix A) in the course of the current tourism campaign many other organisations and key tourism businesses like Colchester Zoo, Wivenhoe House, Wilkin's of Tiptree and others have worked with the Council to make the most of the opportunities created.

4.5 Comparisons with marketing for other destinations.

In tourism marketing like for like comparisons are difficult as no two destinations are the same in terms of their tourism offer, profile, geographical location etc. The scope for this review suggested a comparison to be made with the approach to marketing for other destinations, specifically York, Bath and Lincoln. All these cities have devolved their marketing and information services to an officially recognised destination management organisation (DMO) or similar, funded through a combination of private and public sector membership fees, sponsorship, earned income and external grants, so a very different delivery and operational model to Colchester. With the exception of Visit Lincoln they have not responded to requests for information to assist in the compilation of this report. However a comparison with their marketing activity in the public domain does suggest that all deploy a similar marketing mix to Colchester in general terms, although none currently have a dedicated television advertisement.

The Panel should be assured the Council is keen to learn from best practice in other areas, – the Lincoln Knights Campaign referenced in the scope for instance. The VIC and Communications and Marketing Team monitor the promotional activity of other destinations, and members of the latter attended an LGA conference in February dedicated to place marketing and building a destination brand, and learning from this will be applied going forward.

4.6 Supporting the tourism experience

The tourism experience consists of everything which impacts and influences a visitor to the area: all the things that make a place distinctive and attractive such as the natural and built environment, the heritage and culture, events, retail etc; the infrastructure that help make it an easy place to visit such as parking and signage; the services and amenities that cater for the needs of visitors (and of residents) such as hotels, restaurants, taxis and public transport; and the day-to-day services that make a place clean, safe and welcoming.

Clearly on this basis services all across the Council have a role in delivering the tourism or visitor experience.

On the operational side, unlike many local authorities which have ceased to fund direct tourism services, CBC retains a front line information service at the Visitor Information Centre. In addition to their customer facing remit the team has a role in maintaining and building upon the image and reputation of the Borough through Visit Colchester's digital presence; attending events to promote and represent Colchester; developing relationships with stakeholders; and in influencing visitor behaviour in sensitive areas such as Constable Country. They work collaboratively with colleagues elsewhere in the Council and externally on small but effective interventions that improve the immediate visitor experience. For example providing tourism focussed questions for inclusion in the Hackney Carriage License Test, or developing themed guided tours for historic areas of Colchester like the Dutch Quarter, Hythe and Lexden and across the Borough for Wivenhoe, Dedham and West Mersea. Following feedback from coach operators and group organisers the team worked with the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) and Essex County Council (ECC) to organise an additional coach drop off in the High Street.

The Council also owns, maintains and continually invests in some of the area's key visitor attractions: most notably Colchester Castle Museum, but also Castle Park, LeisureWorld, Highwoods Country Park and others. The formation of the Colchester Events Company in 2016 has led to a new focus on large scale event provision which is key to attracting visitors to any destination, while CBC has also provided grants to over 40 external event providers through the Festival Support Fund in 2016/17 and 2017/18.

Through the Strategic Plan 2015-18 the Council has recognised the importance of the Borough's heritage assets and a raft of projects to protect, interpret and promote these have taken place over the past three years, including work to improve access to the Roman Wall in Priory Street; the publication of the Historic Colchester Guide; the launch of <https://colchesterheritage.co.uk> Heritage Explorer website; the Marking The Gates project and the installation of new interpretation panels. Funds totalling £33K have been made available to the Colchester Archaeological Trust to assist in the development of the Roman Circus Visitor Centre and the interpretation of the site.

In the scope for this review a desired outcome was it should lead to the development of a '*multi agency / authority policy on key tangible assets to enhance historic offering i.e. Public Realm Guidelines (lampposts, street furniture, night-time lighting strategy, signage design strategies)*'. It should be noted the Council recognises the importance of the quality of the built environment and public realm, not least because of the impression it makes on visitors. CBC has previously adopted both a Town Centre Public Realm Strategy and the Colchester Lighting Strategy (Appendix D) and is currently applying for central government funding via the Planning and Delivery Fund for Design and Quality to update and roll out a new suite of strategic guidance.

The Council acknowledges implementation has been slow in some areas, but would stress this is down to a lack of finance rather than an absence of strategic planning or ambition. Even so work to improve the public realm is ongoing and CBC are currently in discussions with ECC around Queen Street/St Botolphs area improvements, and are also now commissioning design work for key public spaces such as St Nicholas Square and Balcerne Square and will then look to secure funds.

While the local authority has a key role in any destination, the tourism experience can only be delivered in partnership with other organisations and the private sector. In recent years Colchester has seen huge external investment in projects directly linked to the visitor economy, many of which have been enabled by or delivered in partnership with CBC.

This has led to new attractions such as Firstsite and Claudius Gateway and the redevelopment or expansion of existing attractions such as the £4.2m redisplay of Colchester Castle; major investment in new hotel capacity such as Greyfriars and Premier Inn, key in appealing to different market segments, plus redevelopment of existing businesses such as Wivenhoe House and the George; new restaurant and retail development including the £35m redevelopment of a destination department store, Fenwicks; new leisure and entertainment facilities such as the David Lloyd Leisure Club and the Curzon Cinema complex.

The innovative Fixing The Link wayfinding project, delivered in partnership with the railway franchise operator Abellio, which welcomes and helps visitors navigate the journey from the main train station to the centre of town, is another example of how the Council is finding ways to improve the tourism environment at a time when budgets are restricted.

4.7 The future

Core tourism provision will be maintained in financial year 2018/19, but the current additionally funded tourism campaign will end in June 2018 should no further funding become available, as is likely given the financial position of the Council. However the Communications and Marketing and VIC Teams will work to use the legacy of the campaign in terms of marketing materials, contacts and relationships to try and maintain its momentum. New opportunities for partnership working, for example such as may come out of the possible adoption of a Business Improvement District (BID) will also be actively explored. The new Strategic Plan 2018-21 will continue to place a priority on supporting tourism.

The Council recognises Colchester's tourism potential and would like to do much more to promote and develop this going forward. However, while we

acknowledge many of the things alluded to in the scope, and indeed identified in our own strategic plans around regeneration, are vitally important they will require significant funding and resource that we don't have at the current time, although we will continue to endeavour to make the best use of the resources we do have and to seek external funding wherever possible.

5. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

5.1 This Review has no Equality, Diversity or Human Rights implications.

6. Standard References

6.1 There are no consultation or publicity considerations, or financial; community safety; health and safety or risk management implications.

7. Strategic Plan References

7.1 2015-2018

Prosperous

Promote Colchester to attract further inward investment and additional businesses, providing greater and more diverse employment and tourism opportunities

Thriving

Promote Colchester's heritage and wide ranging tourism attractions to enhance our reputation as a destination

7.2 2018-2021

Growth

Help make sure Colchester is a welcoming place for all residents and visitors

Opportunity

Promote and enhance Colchester borough's heritage and visitor attractions to increase visitor numbers and to support job creation

Appendices

Appendix A: Presentation

Appendix B: 2016 Economic Impact of Tourism Report for Colchester

Appendix C: Town Centre Public Realm Strategy and Colchester Lighting Strategy