



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITY**

**to
PLANNING AND LICENSING COMMITTEE
16 NOVEMBER 2017**

DENGIE GATEWAY PROJECT OUTCOMES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To update the Committee on progress made towards the completion of the Dengie Gateway Project that was funded by the Coastal Communities Fund.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) that the Project Outcomes of the Dengie Gateway Project be noted;
- (ii) that Members provide comments on and note the contents of the Destination Marketing Strategy (**APPENDIX 1**).

3. THE DENGIE GATEWAY PROJECT

3.1 Background

3.1.1 Members will be aware that the Council was successful in obtaining a total of £330,000 of funding to undertake the Dengie Gateway Project. The bulk of the funding (£292,000) was received through the Coastal Communities Fund and the remaining money provided by the Magnox Socio-economic fund (£20,000) and match funding from the District Council (£17,000).

3.1.2 The money was awarded to the Council on the basis that the project would help mitigate the economic impact of the closure of Bradwell power station and would indirectly support 37.5 tourism related jobs. It was hoped that as a result of the project an additional 50,000 visitors would visit the District and that this in turn would generate an additional £1.8M visitor spend in the local community. Visitor data would be established using the Economic Value of Tourism Report that is produced annually.

3.1.3 A number of project objectives were also included within the original bid and are detailed below:

- Promotion of the Dengie and Maldon District as a visitor destination;
- Promotion of the District as a key gateway to visitors to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPBs) Wild Coast Project at Wallasea;

- Establishment of a 75 mile coastal trail;
- Expansion of the Burnham-on-Crouch Town Pontoon.

3.2 Update on Project Outcomes

- 3.2.1 Members will receive a short presentation detailing how the project has been developed and delivered. Members will have recently received a copy of the latest Economic Impact of Tourism report which highlights a number of successes including growth in visitor numbers and spend. It is clear that tourism is contributing an increasing amount to the local economy.
- 3.2.2 The project aim was to deliver 50,000 additional visitors over the two years of the project. It is calculated that visitor numbers across the District have increased by 140,000 and 128,000 compared to the previous years in 2015 and 2016 respectively.

3.3 Promotion of the Dengie and Maldon District

- 3.3.1 The promotion of the Dengie and Maldon District has been a major area of work during the project. The following provides a list of achievements that have been delivered as a result of the Dengie Gateway Project:
- Sense of Place branding has been developed and available for businesses, attractions or organisations within the District to use. The branding has been used on a number of refreshed publication and promotional campaigns.
 - A new branding website www.WeAreMaldonDistrict.co.uk and a range of downloadable assets are available for use by partner organisations.
 - Launch of a new website www.visitmaldondistrict.co.uk that has improved functionality and links to the new branding.
 - Launched a Tourist Information Centre (TIC) e-shop allowing goods to be sold online and bookings to be taken for Promenade Park Beach Huts.
 - Two Tourism Summits held to pull together tourism providers to help develop the sense of place brand and encourage collaborative working between all parties.
 - Improved social media presence and impact.
 - New Destination Marketing Strategy for 2017-2022 has been developed (a copy of the Marketing Strategy is included as **APPENDIX 1**).
 - Establishment of ‘hub’ concept at Burnham-on-Crouch, Bradwell St Peter’s Chapel, Maldon Promenade Park, Heybridge Basin and Tollesbury.
 - New District Guide and mini guides have been produced and are being distributed in accordance with the marketing plan.
 - Refreshed maps have been produced to help ensure consistency throughout publications and online resources.
 - Continued working with the RSPB to promote the Wallasea Wild Coast Project.

- 3.3.2 The aim of this element of the project was to maximise the resources from the funding to enable lower cost promotions to be sustained after the Dengie Gateway project ends.
- 3.3.3 A destination marketing plan has been produced and is one example where the funding has enabled the production of something that will have a lasting legacy alongside the physical infrastructure discussed later.
- 3.3.4 Members' comments are sought on the marketing strategy and they are asked to note that it is intended the strategy will be the driving force behind marketing carried out by the Council's Tourism Information Centres over the next five years.

3.4 The Saltmarsh Trail and Saltmarsh Coast

- 3.4.1 Officers have been working with Natural England, the lead organisation in delivery of the new England Coastal Path (ECP). Work has concentrated on developing hub infrastructure to help promote sustainable use of the coastal trails to help avoid potential duplication with the ECP project. The following have been achieved:
- New coastal trail signage and branding reflecting the 'Saltmarsh Coast' have been designed and purchased. Installation is taking place at key locations.
 - Talking posts have been purchased and are being installed. The posts provide audio interpretation at various points on the trail. An example is available to view in the reception area.
 - Visitor counters are being installed at hubs and other locations across the district to help establish benchmark data for the number of trail users.
 - Waymark signs have been produced to make the trail easy to follow and help prevent trespass onto private land and or sensitive habitats. These will be installed over the winter with land owner consent.
 - A new Saltmarsh75 website has been create to help celebrate the Saltmarsh Coast's annual walking and running challenge.
 - Social media efforts to promote the event have increased and the event is now followed by 1,300 people on Facebook.

3.5 Expansion of the Burnham-on-Crouch Town Pontoon

- 3.5.1 One of the focus points of the Dengie Gateway Project has been to establish strong links with the RSPB Wild Coast project on Wallasea Island across the river Crouch from Burnham-on-Crouch. A key part of this would be improved ferry connectivity with Essex Marina and in time, the RSPBs pontoon that will allow direct access to the Wild Coast Project. At the time of writing the RSPB have not yet identified funding for a pontoon on their land but have now applied for planning permission from Rochford District Council. It is also worth noting that whilst a lot of work has been carried out at Wallasea there are no visitor facilities other than a small car park and shelter.
- 3.5.2 The Crouch Coastal Communities Team (CCT) has been exploring various projects to improve ferry crossings between the Maldon and Rochford Districts including proposals that would include a brand new ferry pontoon on private land within

Burnham on Crouch. After some lengthy discussion with land owners it now seems that the CCTs would now like to base the Burnham-on-Crouch access point on the Council's Town pontoon.

- 3.5.3 Whilst these discussions have been ongoing it has been prudent not to carry out the works originally proposed to the Pontoon as the CCT may have been seeking funding from the Coastal Communities Fund in future. However, in the background, Officers have been preparing to purchase a new pontoon section in accordance with the original plan.
- 3.5.4 Discussions with the Crouch CCT have now progressed further and they have requested that the Council investigates the costs of improving wheelchair access to the existing pontoon and to increase the pontoon's length to allow larger vessels to berth at lower states of tide.
- 3.5.5 At this point in time these discussions are ongoing but it is possible that the original budget to improve the pontoon could be spent as planned and further funding is sought to improve access. It is worth noting that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) have been informed of these developments and changes to the original project timetable.
- 3.5.6 Officers will provide more detail in their presentation.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The Coastal Communities Fund provided a substantial grant to Maldon District Council to implement the Dengie Gateway project. The project is now reaching its conclusion and the majority of the project has been completed as planned.
- 4.2 The latest report on the Economic Impact of Tourism to the local economy has proven that visitor numbers have increased beyond the targets set within the original project bid and the project has achieved the outcomes originally set.
- 4.3 The improvements to the Burnham-on-Crouch Town pontoon will be implemented once certainty has been achieved with regards to the Crouch Coastal Team's plans for an improved ferry crossing.

5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE GOALS

- 5.1 The Tourism Team working with stakeholders contributes towards protecting and shaping the District and balances the future needs of the community. The promotion of the District, especially the use of open space such as the Coastal trail encourages an active local population with healthy lifestyles and contributes to a diverse, sustainable and vibrant local economy.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – The Dengie Gateway Project has had a positive impact on customers and has contributed to an overall increase in visitor numbers
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – Not applicable.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – To be confirmed.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial and human)** – The Project has been delivered within the allocated budget.
- (v) **Impact on the Environment** – Tourism can have a negative impact on the wider environment as a result of increased pressure on sensitive areas or through increased movement of people. The Dengie Gateway project has concentrated on creating hubs in locations that are less sensitive and that have existing visitor infrastructure.

Background Papers:

Economic Value of Tourism report 2015 and 2016.

Crouch Coastal Team minutes.

Enquiries to:

Ben Brown, Group Manager – Leisure, Countryside and Tourism, (Tel: 01621 876107).