



REPORT FROM THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE TOURISM TASK & FINISH GROUP

- 1.1 This item of business was considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 6 November 2024 with recommendations to commission a consultant to produce a tourism and culture strategy for the borough and to include the work of the Task & Finish Group into the specification for the strategy. An extract of the key elements of the report to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee is attached.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is proposed that Cabinet **RESOLVES**

- (1) That the commissioning of a consultant be approved to produce a Tourism and Culture Strategy for the borough.
- (2) That the work of the Task and Finish Group is incorporated into the specification for the Strategy.
- (3) That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee be invited to scrutinise and comment on the Strategy as it is developed.



UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE TOURISM TASK & FINISH GROUP

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the Committee with a report on the progress of the work of the Tourism Scrutiny Task & Finish Group and make recommendations for next steps.
- 1.2 At a meeting of the former [Scrutiny Committee](#) held in February 2024, Members agreed to form a Task & Finish Group to engage with officers, stakeholders and partners and scope out the opportunities for promoting tourism and growing the tourism economy in Castle Point.

2 LINKS TO COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 This project links to the Corporate Plan 2021-24 Priority Area 1: Economy and Growth and the Productivity and Business Growth Objectives

3 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 Tourism has a substantial role to play in the growth of Castle Point's economy. The total value of the sector increased to £106.4m in 2022, from £90.4m in 2014 (the last time Castle Point collected this data).
- 3.2 Job growth is projected in Castle Point's accommodation, food services and recreation sector, with 3.1k jobs in 2024, estimated to grow to 3.4k jobs in the next 20 years.
- 3.3 At its meeting of December 2023, the Cabinet agreed to request the Place and Communities Policy & Scrutiny Committee to review the Council's approach to promoting tourism opportunities in Castle Point and make recommendations back to cabinet on what the Council should do, both as a Council and in partnership with others to improve the promotion of the local tourism offer and support local businesses in the tourism and leisure sectors.

4 PROGRESS ON ACTIVITY

- 4.1 The first meeting of the Task & Finish Group took place on 4 March 2024 at this meeting. It was agreed as a first step for Members to begin scoping the assets. Following some initial mapping activity, the group was put on hold due to the pre-election period and spell of identifying new members for the group.
- 4.2 To assist with the work of this group, and understand where there could be opportunities to grow, the Economic Development Team collected a set of data to understand the baseline position for the Tourism and Visitor Economy in Castle Point. This dataset is available to view in Annex B.
- 4.3 The Task & Finish Group, chaired by Cllr Diana Jones, reconvened on 25 September, with the task of revisiting the ‘asset mapping’ exercise, making suggestions on our current position, and presenting ideas to improve the offer. Ultimately answering the question “what is Castle Point’s proposition for visitors?”
- 5.4 In terms of the overall proposition the following main themes have emerged from Members’ feedback:
- **Build on our strengths:** The borough has lots of good natural green spaces and walks. The Hadleigh Mountain Biking venue is also a particular pull for cyclists. Trails should be developed and promoted to encourage visitors to explore our green spaces. It was noted that this also aligns with objectives around improving local health and wellbeing.
 - **There is a strong heritage offer, that could be better leveraged.** This could include working more proactively with the number of enthusiastic local volunteering and archives groups.
 - **Improved promotion:** We are fortunate to have healthy (well occupied) high streets with lots of independent businesses that would benefit from improved promotion.
 - **Improved coordination around events and art trails.** The borough has a fast growing creative sector and lots of active community groups. These groups are typically self organising and undertake a lot of their promotion through word of mouth, social media and community groups. There is scope to consider how this could be supported and coordinated centrally to improve the borough’s offer, and provide support for small scale enterprises.
- 4.5 The borough of Castle Point is unique in nature, being home to five distinctive towns with their own feel and visitor experience.
- 4.6 Unlike some areas in Essex, there is no central attraction (pier, major sports stadium or music venue, stately home). Rather, the borough has a unique series of smaller offerings around each of its settlements which combined

offer a breadth of visitor opportunities that we need to promote and celebrate. The Task & Finish Group identified different propositions for Canvey and for Hadleigh and South Benfleet:

- It was considered that Canvey Island is popular with families, as a cheaper alternative to Southend. The seafront area extending from Thorney Bay to Concord Beach were highlighted as key attractors for this group. Consideration was given by the Task& Finish group as to how to we can amplify this and work with the traders, operators and small businesses on and near the seafront, and connect the seafront with Canvey Town Centre and Northwick Retail park, to improve the visitor experience and enhance visitor spend.
- Hadleigh was highlighted both in respect of the opportunities at Hadleigh Country Park in terms of world class mountain biking and natural green space, and also because it has a burgeoning creative and cultural offer. Coordination, promotion and business development is needed to grow this area of the economy.
- South Benfleet was highlighted due to its collection of heritage assets and also its strong food and drink offer. This was often connected by the Task & Finish group with opportunities to explore local green spaces such as Benfleet and Southend Marshes, the England Coast Path and opportunities to walk up into Thundersley.

5.7 Based on the work undertaken by the Task & Finish Group, there is clear scope to develop a proposition for tourism development in Castle Point, which overlaps with opportunities to develop the cultural (heritage and arts and culture) offer in the borough. There was a sense that a clear strategy was needed to draw this out and ensure that tourism growth was encouraged and promoted in Castle Point.

5 OPTIONS

5.1 **Option 1: Do nothing:** The tourism sector has grown since 2014 without intervention by the Council. However, the discussions of the Task and Finish Group have made it clear that opportunities for improving the tourism offer and growing tourism and leisure spend are being missed.

5.2 **Option 2: Commission a Tourism and Culture Strategy for Castle Point:** This will enable the Council to develop a coherent strategy for tourism in Castle Point and position it to make the most effective investments in the borough to improve the tourism offer and promote growth of the tourism and cultural sectors. It is clear through the discussions of the Task and Finish Group that there are distinct propositions for the different parts of the tourism offer in Castle Point that could be developed and promoted through effective strategy.

5.3 **Option 3: Castle Point Council to become members of Visit Essex:** whilst this may be a recommendation of the Tourism and Culture Strategy, it is clear from elsewhere in Essex that the offer from Visit Essex is most effective where a clear proposition is in place around the tourism offer. This option may therefore come to bear at a later date, but would not be effective at this time.

5.4 Preferred Option: **Option 2** would be the preferred option.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 A separate report to Cabinet on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund is being made in November 2024. If approved, the resources for the preparation of a Tourism and Culture Strategy will be available to address the recommendations of this report.

7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

9 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no equality implications arising from the recommendations of this report. The Tourism and Culture Strategy will need to have an Equality Impact Assessment as it is developed and before the Council can consider its adoption.

Background Papers:-

Annexes:

Annex A - Scrutiny Committee Report, recommending the inception of a Tourism Task & Finish Group, 14 February 2024

Annex B - Tourandism Asset Maps and walking routes

Exempt Annex C - Tourism statistics and projections for Castle Point

ANNEX A

Place and Communities Policy Scrutiny Committee

14th February 2024

Tourism in Castle Point

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 At its meeting of 17 December 2023, the Cabinet agreed to request the Place and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee to review the Council's approach to tourism in Castle Point and make recommendations back to Cabinet on what the Council should do and in partnership with others to improve the local tourism offer, promote the borough and support local businesses in the tourism, culture and leisure sectors.

2. Links to Council Priorities and Objectives

Priorities

Economy and Growth

Place

Environment

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Committee is recommended to form a task and finish group to engage with officers, stakeholders and partners and scope out the opportunities for tourism and growing the tourism economy in Castle Point.

4. Report

- 4.1 There is currently a gap in tourism and cultural policy within Castle Point. Limited data has been collected in relation to the tourism sector in the last 10 years. However, data from 2014 showed that the total value of tourism to Castle Point at that time was **£90.4m per annum**, with around **1,760 people employed** in tourism related jobs (5.1% of local jobs). The borough is rich in attractions and cultural activities, with the prospects of a burgeoning creative sector.
- 4.2 Whilst COVID impacted on the tourism economy both nationally and globally, it is estimated that the industry in the UK is around **3-4% away from full recovery**. The rise in staycations and the cost of living have helped to strengthen local opportunities for tourism and leisure.
- 4.3 Given the value of the tourism economy in Castle Point, which is not insignificant, there is a clear driver to consider how this can be supported, strengthened and promoted to the benefit of the local economy, and to the quality of place. Promotion of tourism opportunities in Maldon between 2014 and 2022, for example, saw tourism spend increase by 24.7% and an additional 790 jobs provided in the sector.

ANNEX A

Potential Benefits of Tourism Growth

- 4.4 A strong approach to tourism within an area can help revitalise the image and reputation of a place. This links into the work being done on place-making through the Castle Point Plan.
- 4.5 On top of this, successful tourism has a range of knock-on impacts on the local economy. As well as the tourism-based industries employing local people, business turnover arises because of tourist spending, from the purchase of supplies and services locally by businesses in receipt of visitor spending and because of the spending of wages in businesses by employees.
- 4.6 Tourism opportunities also provide opportunities for residents to be healthy and active by encouraging local people to get out and about in their local area. Developing the tourism offer therefore also links into the Council's agenda around health and wellbeing.

Scoping the opportunities in relation to Tourism

- 4.7 The opportunities for tourism and tourist activities often relate to the unique characteristics of a place, and assets that can be found within both the built and natural environment. A clear strategy is needed to ensure that those opportunities are harnessed for the good of local businesses and the local community and don't cause adverse impacts.
- 4.8 Tourism is not delivered by any one sector or organisation, but is delivered by different organisations and businesses understanding the unique characteristics that make up a place and working in an aligned way to enhance the visitor experience. The strategy needs to be able to show the borough can quickly respond to opportunities within a diverse sector. It is therefore critical that partners and stakeholders are engaged in the development of the tourism proposition for a place.
- 4.9 There is need for work to be undertaken to scope the opportunities for tourism in Castle Point having regard to the unique characteristics of the places and to identify those partners and stakeholders that we need to work with to develop a shared understanding of what a successful tourism offer may look like.

5 Next Steps

- 5.1 Members of the committee are recommended to form a task and finish group to engage with stakeholders, and partners to scope the opportunities for promoting and growing the tourism and cultural offer in Castle Point.

6 Financial implications

- 6.1 At this stage it is unclear what the financial implications will be. This position will need to be updated as the work is progressed, and implications become clear. The committee should be cognisant of the Council's budget forecast during the course of this work.

ANNEX A

8 Legal Implications

8.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

9 Human Resources

9.1 At this stage it is unclear what the human resource implications will be. This position will need to be updated as the work is progressed, and implications become clear.

10 Equality Implications

10.1 There are no negative equality implications arising directly from this report.

10.2 At this stage it is unclear what the equality implications will be of the work to be undertaken. This position will need to be updated as the work is progressed, and implications become clear. The committee should be cognisant of the Public Sector Equality Duty during the course of this work.

11 IT and Asset Management Implications

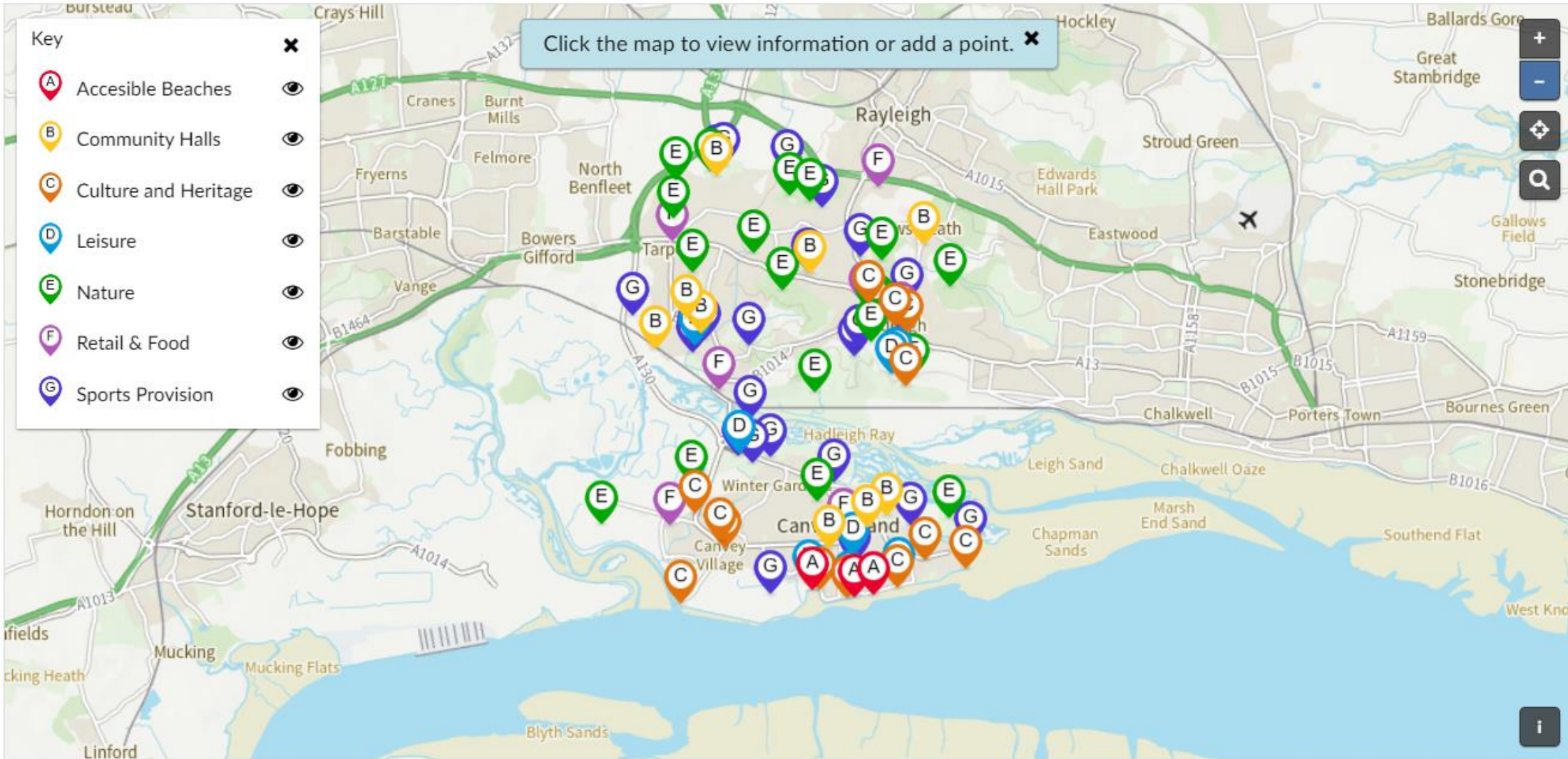
11.1 There are no IT implications arising from this work. It is unlikely that IT implications will arise, however this position will be reviewed as the work is progressed and implications become clear.

11.2 At this stage it is unclear if this work will have an impact on Council owned assets. This position will need to be updated as the work is progressed, and implications become clear.

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<p>Accessible Beaches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorney Bay Beach • Labworth Beach • Concord Beach 	<p>Culture & Arts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canvey Arts & Murals • Labworth Café • The Bay Museum • Canvey Transport Museum • B17 Bomber Crash • Lobster Smack Inn • Dutch Cottage Museum • Canvey Heritage Centre and Museum • Hadleigh Castle • St James the Less Church • Hadleigh Old Fire Station • Hadleigh Olympic Statue • Badgers Hall Wood
<p>Community Halls :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Paddocks • War Memorial Hall, Canvey • Smallgains Hall, Canvey • Rookery View Hall • Richmond Hall • St Mary's Church Hall • Runnymede Hall • Daws Heath Hall • Woodside Hall • St Mary's Church – Addition in October 	<p>Leisure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canvey Bay Picnic area • Leisure Park with Amusements and Facilities • Kismet Park Play Area • Waterside Farm Recreation Ground Playground • King George V Playing Field • Richmond Park Playground • Salvation Army Rare Breeds Centre • Essex Glamping, Hadleigh • Canvey Miniature Railway
<p>Nature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canvey Wick • Canvey Marsh • Canvey Lake • Canvey Heights • Hadleigh Country Park 	<p>Retail & Food</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Canvey Retail Park • Knightswick Shopping Centre • South Benfleet Area • Hadleigh Town Centre • Vic House Corner

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salvation Army Farm • Memorial Recreation Ground • Hadleigh Allotment Site • Belfairs Wood • Westwood • Thundersley Glen • Middle Valley • Thundersley Great Common • Thundersley Little Common • Villa Park, Appleton • Tarpots Recreation Ground • Woodside Play Area/ Woodside Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benfleet Town Centre (Tarpots) • Rayleigh Weir
<p>Sports Provision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Football Club (Concord Rangers) • Multi Use Games Area, Labworth • Island Yacht Club • Football pitches, Canvey Heights • Canvey Island Rugby Football Club • Golf Course, Canvey • Waterside Playing Space • Waterside Farm Leisure Centre • Benfleet Yacht Club • Boyce Hill Golf Club • South Benfleet & Canvey Bowls • Richmond Park • South Benfleet Playing Fields • Jotmans Riding School • Hadleigh Mountain Biking • Essex Leisure Fisheries • John Burrows Play Ground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thundersley Rovers • Braeside Equestrian Centre • Benfleet Football Club • Castlepoint Bowls Club • Runnymede Leiusre Centre • Virgin Active Gym

Walking Routes

