



A RECOVERY PLAN FOR THE ESSEX TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

**Our 6 point plan
repositioning Essex
and supporting our
industry for
sustainable growth
and success**

visit **essex**

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A person is riding a bicycle away from the camera on a path through a forest. The trees have yellow and orange autumn leaves, and the scene is bathed in warm, golden light. The person is silhouetted against the bright background.

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Introduction

Over the past year COVID-19 has had a detrimental effect on the economy, and, tourism and hospitality have been amongst the hardest hit, it has shown just how fragile the industry is. Over 60% of the £3.4billion industry was estimated to have been lost. 50% of businesses decreased their staffing levels and 73% were running at 75% capacity or less during the months they were open. National forecasts suggest that it will be the end of 2022 before domestic tourism recovers to 2019 levels.

Whilst government intervention schemes like the VAT reduction, furlough, Eat out to help out schemes have helped our businesses, the impact of losing the trading periods of Easter, May half term and Christmas have a long lasting effect putting many tourism and hospitality businesses in danger of permanent closure.

Most businesses expect to survive this summer, however, 35% think they are unlikely to survive beyond March 2022. There is a need not only to support businesses in the short term but also to prepare them for sustainability. The majority of businesses believe it will take 1-2 years to return to profitability and we would like to assist in accelerating the growth.

COVID-19 however has made us take stock and reset. The pandemic has presented some opportunities which could place us with a competitive advantage over other destinations. We often consider ourselves as a poor relation to other destinations rather than celebrating and building on what we have. In Essex we suffer far less from seasonality than other destinations, we have plenty of open outdoor space, we have a large local captive audience, we are not reliant on international visitors, we don't have over tourism issues, and, we work with the majority of tourism businesses across the county. Combined with our good weather and hidden gems Essex is uniquely positioned to take a full advantage of the forecasted staycation trend. Many traditional UK destinations will be full over the summer months and we can exploit this and encourage people to Essex instead, encouraging last minute breaks, which will also help to alleviate some of the issues that may arise from "Spreading" or double booking.

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New Opportunities

- ◆ Local people – Essex has one of the largest populations and a high proportion that are used to working in London but now working from home presenting an opportunity for increased local spend, and to increase the VFR market once families can meet.
- ◆ Seasonality – Essex has an all year round offer to appeal to local and national visitors.
- ◆ With foreign holidays an uncertainty the staycation is predicted to boom, whereas many other destination suffer from over tourism we have capacity.
- ◆ With over 70% of Essex hosting rural areas combined with a long coastline we have an abundance of open space to allow for social distancing and outdoor attractions.
- ◆ There is a focus on the industry which needs to be maintained and this has led to increased financial support with new funding streams becoming accessible. This funding will help Visit Essex support the industry.
- ◆ Visit Essex will take a new approach to working with the industry, an approach that is collaborative and engaging.



We will plan to increase our market share and grow the visitor economy beyond the 2019 baseline through a phased strategy locally and nationally. With the rise in popularity of staycations and staying locally if all restrictions are lifted the issue over the summer may be visitor management rather than promotion, however, preparing for the longer term will help the sustainability of businesses beyond the summer and ensure success of businesses and the destination. The challenge over the year will be to encourage increased spend, a matter of value over volume and disperse visitors away from honeypot areas to other locations.

This plan sets out how Visit Essex intends on supporting businesses over the year to prepare for a sustainable future and has 6 key priorities to best cope with the impacts of COVID. We will continue to emphasise the quality and diversity of our offer but also begin to differentiate the Essex brand and reposition the county.

1. **Understand our customers and deliver to their needs ensuring the product is consumer ready**
2. **Develop our digital infrastructure**
3. **Supporting our businesses to ensure their sustainability and success**
4. **Deliver stand out marketing campaigns to aid recovery and re-position Essex by creating awareness of assets**
5. **Position Essex as an important component in place making and place marketing,**
6. **Building links and celebrating collaboration**



A RECOVERY PLAN FOR THE ESSEX TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

1. Understand our customers and deliver to their needs ensuring the product is consumer ready

- ◆ Provide a focus on bookability. Onboard bookable product and experiences onto the TXGB platform so that consumers can book directly on Visitessex.com; and work with businesses to get them on other platforms to promote to wider and new audiences.
- ◆ Assist businesses in the development of new experiences to increase the county's experiential offer and increase profits for businesses by attracting people to a unique product rather than price.
- ◆ Storytelling is so important in promotion we will work with businesses to develop their unique stories that can give them a competitive edge.
- ◆ We will build intelligence to assess the real impact on businesses as well as changing consumer behaviours to help inform our asks of Government, as well as our marketing campaigns and approaches to visitor management.
- ◆ Create example itineraries as part of our dedicated campaign on Visitessex.com, suggesting products that could be connected together based on the target audience.
- ◆ Encouraging businesses to support VisitEngland's We're good to Go initiative and promote businesses that have the stamp of approval to assist with consumer confidence.



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2. Develop our digital infrastructure

- ◆ Create a booking platform on the Visit Essex website so that consumers can book directly with Visit Essex.
- ◆ Grow reach and engagement on social channels by providing inspirational content
- ◆ Ensure that the website is consumer friendly and is increasing its users
- ◆ Develop ready to use digital assets in the form of photography and videos that can be used in the future
- ◆ Ensure we are maximising reach via advertising to ensure Essex is at the forefront of people's minds

3. Supporting our businesses to ensure their sustainability and success

- ◆ Provide business grants up to £3k to businesses to support adaptations and enable safe and sustainable re-openings
- ◆ Devise a development programme which allows for greater collaboration and a 1year training programme
- ◆ Provide relevant information and updates via virtual events for members and continue to provide a comprehensive signpost to all relevant advice and government guidance.
- ◆ Host a programme of business support webinars free of charge particularly around the development of experiences and storytelling and bookability
- ◆ We will continue to lobby local and central Government for additional support for the sector, giving Essex's visitor economy a strong, co-ordinated voice ensuring that the specific needs of the rural and coastal visitor economy are fully represented.
- ◆ Provide recognition for our tourism businesses by working with regional colleagues on an awards programme which will feed into the VisitEngland national awards.

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4. Deliver stand out marketing campaigns to aid recovery and re-position Essex by creating awareness of assets

- ◆ Bid for additional funding and maximise existing funding to align all campaign activity to extend our collective reach and deliver a campaign that positions Essex as a must visit destination, driving visitor numbers back up.
- ◆ Work with the industry to design, develop and deliver co-ordinated marketing campaigns which will appeal to a domestic audience with a focus on short breaks and higher spending visitors for 2021 and beyond;
- ◆ Lead a marketing campaign that gives confidence to residents and encourages local spend and VFR activity.
- ◆ Focus on visitor management particularly in the summer to disperse visitors away from honeypot areas and encourage visits throughout the year.
- ◆ Engage in all national initiatives designed to inspire confidence and generate demand
- ◆ Target media familiarisation visits from priority markets and publications related to thematic strands.





5. Position Essex as an important component in place marketing and place making

- ◆ Build greater links with VisitEngland on both strategy and marketing and feed in to the DMO forum and input into the DMO review
- ◆ Raise the profile of Visit Essex amongst destination peers via trade organisations and networks e.g. NCTA, Tourism Alliance, TMI etc.
- ◆ Develop an associates programme with selected suppliers that will have mutual benefits.
- ◆ Working with surrounding counties on shared agendas
- ◆ Work with local strategic organisations e.g. SELEP and RCCE, ensuring there is a voice for rural and coastal tourism locally and regionally feeding into strategies
- ◆ Work with third parties on marketing and development initiatives that help support our members and the Visit Essex plan.

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6. Building links and collaborating with others

- ◆ Start to build a narrative to re-position and challenge perceptions.
- ◆ Create an engagement programme for stakeholders.
- ◆ Develop a structure for place marketing delivery.
- ◆ Secure on -going funding to ensure sustainability.
- ◆ Gain top-level political and officer commitment and the positioning of Marketing Essex as an integral part of the county's Essex place-making and business support activities.
- ◆ Focus effort on the most promising audiences only and saying no to trying to be everything to everyone; by truly standing out to those audiences compared to the competition.



To Conclude

The year ahead will be without a doubt another challenging one. The outlined tactical plan aims to equip our tourism and hospitality businesses with the tools they need to enable their longevity and growth. Visit Essex will work collectively with the industry to re-position Essex as a safe place with lots of open space that is open all year. Our success will only be achieved by working in partnership.

This is just the beginning of a fresh approach, moving forward we need to ensure that we are addressing climate change and providing the local industry with the tools to enable them to adapt and move towards a greener future, both for the environment and to meet the ever growing consumer demand for eco-tourism.

We also need to recognise that the sector is a critical part of our overall proposition – a key reason why people choose to live and work where they do. The sector serves much more than just ‘tourists’.



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