

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD**

**17 March 2008**

**Report of the Chief Leisure Officer**

**Part 1- Public**

**Matters for Information**

**1 HEART OF KENT TOURISM CONSORTIUM**

**Summary**

**This report updates Members on a number of new initiatives undertaken by the Heart of Kent Tourism Consortium (HOK), including the launch of its new 2008 Holiday Guide.**

**1.1 Background**

- 1.1.1 Members may be aware that this authority has been a member of HOK since 1988. The Consortium is a voluntary tourism marketing partnership between the five West and Mid-Kent local authorities of Ashford, Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells.
- 1.1.2 The HOK Consortium undertakes a range of marketing initiatives which emanate from a strategy and action plan which is reviewed annually. Copies of the strategy and plan are available to Members upon request. The overall objective of the Consortium is to promote and develop the HOK area as a visitor destination, thereby increasing the contribution tourism makes to the local economy.

**1.2 The Heart of Kent Product**

- 1.2.1 The HOK is characterised by numerous historic houses, castles and gardens set in some of the most glorious countryside to be found in the UK. The five historic towns, each with their own character, add to the overall special nature of the HOK product.
- 1.2.2 The area prides itself on the wide range of high quality, accredited accommodation and a variety of things to see and do including heritage, events, cycling and walking. This, combined with its close proximity to London, Ashford International Station and major UK airports at Gatwick and at Heathrow, makes the area an exceptionally attractive option for both domestic and overseas visitors.

### **1.3 The Target Markets**

- 1.3.1 In 2006 Tourism South East (TSE) conducted consumer research and market segmentation. The results form the basis for the target markets for the HOK. These were identified as follows:

#### Domestic Market Segments

- Functionals – self-reliant, price driven, value function over style, traditional values but interested in new experiences; not risk adverse.
- Cosmopolitans - strong, active, confident; style and brand important but as an expression of their self-made identity; high spenders especially on innovation and technology; looking for new challenges and experiences; globetrotters
- Traditionals - slow to adopt new options; strong orientation towards traditional values; value individual attention and service
- Visiting Friends and Relatives

#### Overseas Market Segments

- Belgium/Luxembourg couples without children aged 25-49.
- Germany, DINKS (double income, no kids)
- Belgium/Netherlands, couples aged 40-65/mobile retired/young professionals aged 25-49 without children

### **1.4 2008 HOK Holiday Guide**

- 1.4.1 The 2008 guide was launched at Leeds Castle in December 2007. This year's publication includes 270 accommodation providers, ranging from hotels, bed and breakfast providers to self catering establishments and 100 attractions. The success of the guide is largely due to it being a self financing publication. Each accommodation entry listed is charged a subscription fee and external advertising is sought.
- 1.4.2 85,000 copies of the guide are produced annually, 10, 000 of which are a multi lingual version (French, Dutch and German)
- 1.4.3 37,000 copies of the guide are distributed nationally by Take One Media. Take One Media is one of the UK's leading literature and leaflet distributors; displaying brochures and leaflets for customers via serviced KeyPoint literature display stands in targeted sites across the UK. Sites include Tourist Information Centres in towns and cities and motorway services. The remaining guides are split between the HOK Tourist Information Centres to hand out to the public on

request, with the bulk kept at Tonbridge Castle for brochure fulfilment from advertising campaigns and exhibitions.

- 1.4.4 Copies of the new guide have been sent to all Members of the Council, and additional copies will be available at the meeting.

## **1.5 Destination Management System (DMS)**

- 1.5.1 The DMS enables Tourist Information Centres to store data on local accommodation products, attractions, events and activities and sell their product to a variety of audiences. Visitors to destination web sites can book accommodation online, buy tickets to events and attractions and provide profiling information for targeted information, news and special offers. Partners in the HOK currently hold licenses at their relevant Tourist Information Centres. The following information may be of interest to Members:

- 68 providers out of the 270 in the guide are using the DMS.
- In 2007/08 the value of online bookings totalled £11,996.
- Each Tourist Information Centre in the Consortium manages and updates their relevant geographic area in relation to accommodation providers, events and attractions on the [www.visitheartofkent.com](http://www.visitheartofkent.com) website.
- The HOK website pushes data up to the VisitBritain website, the national portal for visitors looking for information about holidaying in the UK.
- Between 2005 and 2007, visits to the HOK website have increased by 54%.
- Web optimisation is undertaken on a regular basis to ensure the website is found easily in search engines such as yahoo and google. This is achieved by compatibility of key words in searches undertaken by the consumer.

## **1.6 Marketing/PR**

- 1.6.1 HOK has an annual budget of £15,000 to spend on advertising. This budget is managed by a specialist advertising agency, with a detailed advertising plan produced on an annual basis. In 2006, HOK appointed Pennington PR to help raise the profile of the HOK brand/product within local and national media. To date, the value of coverage achieved equates to £30,000.
- 1.6.2 Exhibitions in the UK and abroad are attended by HOK depending on their relevance to target markets. Where possible, this is done in collaboration with other partners. Days Out Fairs/literature exchanges are also attended by individual partners where appropriate.

## **1.7 Liaison with Tourism South East and Kent Tourism Alliance**

- 1.7.1 HOK participates in the Cambridge Model research on a 3 yearly basis which assesses the volume and value of tourism to the region on a district and countywide level. This research is undertaken by Tourism South East. A draft model with 2006 figures has been issued which claims that in total £81M was spent by all visitors on their trip to the borough. This income supported 1,500 jobs (full time equivalent) – these figures are approximate. The final report will be submitted in March 2008.
- 1.7.2 HOK is a member of the Kent Tourism Alliance (KTA) and is represented at board meetings. The KTA is a public/private sector partnership.

## **1.8 Legal Implications**

- 1.8.1 Each partner in the Consortium signs a Service Level Agreement pledging its support to the Consortium for the forthcoming year.

## **1.9 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 1.9.1 Through membership of the HOK and by pooling resources (both financial and expertise) this authority is able to achieve a more cost-effective way of working in this industry than by doing so on an individual basis. The creation of the HOK brand has greater influence in attracting visitors to the region than can be achieved on a local level.
- 1.9.2 Each partner authority contributes £9,500 annually to the Consortium.

## **1.10 Risk Assessment**

- 1.10.1 The HOK Consortium is governed by a Service Level Agreement which incorporates a risk assessment.

## **1.11 Policy Considerations**

- 1.11.1 Healthy Lifestyles, Communications, Community.

Background papers:

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