

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

16 March 2009

Report of the Chief Leisure Officer

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 HEART OF KENT TOURISM CONSORTIUM

Summary

This report informs Members of the recent launch of the 2009 Heart of Kent Holiday Guide and other work undertaken by the Partnership.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Members may be aware that this authority has been a member of Heart of Kent since 1988. The Consortium is a tourism marketing partnership between the five West and Mid Kent local authorities of Ashford, Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells.

1.2 2009 Holiday Guide

1.2.1 The 2009 Guide was launched before Christmas at Aylesford Priory at a networking event attended by around a hundred Heart of Kent businesses. The annual Holiday Guide and website bring visitors to Kent from across the UK and Europe. The website www.visitheartofkent.com and the new guide make planning a stay within the region easy; both have details of accredited accommodation from bed and breakfasts to historic hotels and luxury accommodation with leisure facilities. There are also details of all the events being held round the area and a helpful list of suggested itineraries to make a stay in the Heart of Kent memorable. Copies of the Guide will be available at the meeting.

1.2.2 Public Relations Activity

1.2.3 Since 2006, the Heart of Kent has been working with Pennington PR Agency. Pennington are specialists within the tourism and hospitality industry who look after other related clients including Lapland UK, Bewl Water and Seven Wonders of the Weald. Pennington liaise with the media on behalf of Heart of Kent to help raise the profile of what the area has to offer to visitors and tourists, as well as aiming to increase awareness of the work undertaken by the Partnership within the industry.

1.2.4 Pennington assist Heart of Kent by co-ordinating press releases, arranging press events and interviews to maximise coverage in magazines, newspapers and websites, and on TV and radio. The agency also produce articles and newsletters on behalf of the partnership to promote latest campaigns for example “Kent’s Best Stately Homes and Gardens” which will be launched at the travel trade event Best of Britain and Ireland at Excel in London. Heart of Kent believe it is now more important than ever to encourage domestic tourism and that the current economic climate will mean that more people will be inclined to take day trips and weekend breaks within the UK.

1.3 Exhibitions

1.3.1 As well as aiming to maximise on the UK market, the current exchange rate with the Euro presents an opportunity to increase promotion of the Heart of Kent region in Europe. To help facilitate this, Heart of Kent has joined forces with Visit Kent and 1066 Country to attend various exhibitions over the next few months. In particular focusing on core market areas of Belgium, Holland, France and Germany with the aim of attracting high-spend short-stay visitors. Working together with these other tourism partnerships enables a greater presence at exhibitions whilst reducing the overall cost to the Heart of Kent.

1.4 Tourism South East Support

1.4.1 Tourism South East has announced that it intends to award £8,000 to the Heart of Kent from its sub regional funding sources. Tourism South East acknowledge that Heart of Kent makes a significant contribution to tourism in Kent and feel it is appropriate to support the Partnership at this level. Tourism South East has indicated that the funding must be used to further enhance the work of the Partnership. As such, half of the funding will be used to cover annual website costs with the remaining budget allocated for website development. Options for consideration include online ticketing for events and attractions, translating pages into French, Dutch and German, incorporating a short promotional film about what the region has to offer, as well as further development regarding the partnerships emarketing campaigns.

1.5 Celebrating 21 Years of Tourism Success

1.5.1 2009 is a special year for the partnership as it celebrates its 21st anniversary. For the past 21 years the partnership has been helping to raise the profile of tourism within Kent as it contributes significantly to the Kent economy. In 2006 visitors spent £100,000,000 and the industry supports 20,000 jobs in the West Kent area alone. The internet has proved an amazing tool and over the past year web traffic has increased by 60% with online accommodation bookings by 50%. The partnership will be hosting a celebratory event later this year at Scotney Castle to which all Heart of Kent businesses and partners will be invited. The Heart of Kent is proud of its achievements over the last 21 years and hopes that by working

together with other tourism partners, Kent, the Garden of England, will remain in the spotlight for many more years to come.

1.6 Legal Implications

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

1.7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.7.1 Through membership of the Heart of Kent 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 Heart of Kent brand has greater influence in attracting visitors to the region than can be achieved on a local level.

- 1.7.2 Each partner authority contributes £9,500 annually to the Consortium.

1.8 Risk Assessment

- 1.8.1 The Heart of Kent Consortium is governed by a Service Level Agreement which incorporates a risk assessment.

1.9 Policy Considerations

- 1.9.1 Healthy Lifestyles, Communications, Community.

Background papers:

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