

Destination Southend-on-Sea

A Tourism Strategy and destination plan for the Borough of Southend





Foreword

Southend-on-Sea is one of England's most popular seaside destinations. The world famous pier, seafront attractions and proximity to London has shaped Southend's development over the last century and now welcomes over 6.5M visitors each year.

With a seven mile coastline on offer and an insatiable desire by today's discerning tourists for more, the business community and public sector have come together to set out a vision and action plan for the coming 10 years. By working collectively and sharing a set of goals, and means to achieve them, Southend-on-Sea will keep ahead of the competition during the uncharted financial and social changes we face.

The Southend Tourism Partnership has already pooled great resources and is showing that working together delivers more. There is still much more for us to do however as competition increases and the need to ensure that our message breaks through the noise of the multi-media landscape of destination marketing.

This strategy is aspirational yet will be focused on delivery. Success will require willing participation by stakeholders who value the past but look to the future needs of our visitors and how our economy can be stronger with coordinated tourism activity at its heart.

We are confident of bringing our three coastal community teams closer together to ensure a healthy and prosperous future for all our residents and businesses connected to the tourism agenda.

Southend-on-Sea was built on tourism and this strategy will position the resort for future generations providing jobs, wealth and an attractive place for all to live, work and visit.

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1. Executive Summary

This strategic plan sets out a vision for the visitor economy across the Borough of Southend on Sea over the next 10 years 2017-27.

The aims of the strategy are to provide joint direction to the private, public and third sector for a united ambition to become England's leading coastal tourism destination and to develop the visitor economy prosperously for the whole Borough to benefit from.

It is developed in consultation with key partners already established across the Borough and in particular The Southend Tourism Partnership, The Leigh Coastal Community Team, The Southend Business Improvement District, The Shoeburyness Coastal Community Team, The Southend Business Partnership and Southend Borough Council.

The strategy is jointly owned by various relevant groups in Southend and is for the town's overall prosperity to reach its potential through the social and economic development, recognising the key role that tourism has played and will continue to play in future years to the area. The Borough Council will play a leading role in facilitating and enabling many areas and in particular have significant responsibility in public realm and infrastructure, but the action plan is for all partners to contribute towards and is not intended as a Council only document, rather a joint vision with broad participation from multiple partners. It should help provide confidence to existing tourism businesses and potential investors that the tourism, cultural, creative and leisure sector in Southend is a ripe location for growth.

The action plan shows practical steps towards delivery covering a range of cross cutting themes and shows how the strategic aspirations will be reached. The strategy is not setting out to tackle every issue but will focus of 5 key themes that are pivotal to success.

The document's action plan will be live and updated annually charting progress towards the ambitions incorporating contributions and additions from partners. An annual tourism conference facilitated by the Southend Tourism Partnership will present the strategy and action plan updates each year to provide accountability to stakeholders and ensure a progressive trajectory.

Tourism is one of several key sectors in Borough and has a special place in shaping the town's past. The traditional tourist day visitor offer remains firmly part of the Central Southend offer and will be added to for future visitors. Significant investment by the public and private sector in recent years have developed firm foundations for a stronger and broader tourism offer that supports jobs, prosperity and communities throughout the borough.

A series of metrics such as volume and value studies and consumer research information are identified to measure progress and an initial benchmarking status will present data to baseline the destination's status. In this way our progress and successes can be captured and reviewed along with identifying any areas that may need re-focusing to respond to fast changing macro economic issues.





2. Overview

Southend On Sea is a unitary borough serving 180,000 residents in South Essex. Boasting nine railway stations, an international airport and the world's longest pleasure Pier, the area is one of England's favourite tourist destinations and is on a continuing journey of regeneration and growth. The largest urban area in Essex is also a strategic site for economic growth and a cultural centre of excellence featuring significantly in the Local Enterprise Partnership's (SELEP) growth deal priorities on a number of key projects.

Southend's economy is mixed with approx. 6,000 businesses many of which are small and medium sized enterprises. Tourism is one of the key employment sectors supporting around 7,000 jobs. The developing local plan and Central Area Action Plan identify ambitions to continue to support a thriving visitor economy into the future.





3. Vision - To be England's Number One Coastal Destination

Southend-on-Sea will deliver excellence for visitors and our aim is to be the number one Coastal destination in the country. A range of SMART (Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed) objectives over the lifetime of the journey of this strategy are set out to monitor success and validate the claim.

Southend's tourism offer has been growing over recent years with the emergence and development of new hotels, leisure offer and a burgeoning creative and cultural sector. Visitor numbers have been rising and associated spend increasing in line with the ambitions of the previous business and tourism strategy.

The attraction and demand of Southend as a visitor destination has remained high during good weather periods and development of an increasing events programme to attract out of season visitors has had success. Recent examples led by the Business Improvement District such as fireworks displays and Christmas shopping the areas ability to perform strongly outside the summer period. An eclectic range of cultural events and exhibitions have brought people from further afield to try Southend for new reasons and this strength will be developed further to increase the value of the visitors coming to the area.

The core tourism proposition requires good infrastructure to support the business community whilst developing new products to keep the customer excited and engaged with the offer. By 2027 Southend central seafront will boast a new nationally renown visitor attraction telling the story of

the Thames - the river that built the world. Internationally significant stories of HMS London, and the Prittlewell Prince Saxon finds will be presented in stories that light up the imagination and bring the past to life. This year-round attraction will be complemented by a resurgent Pier boasting an excellent visitor offer and experience befitting the longest pleasure pier in the world.

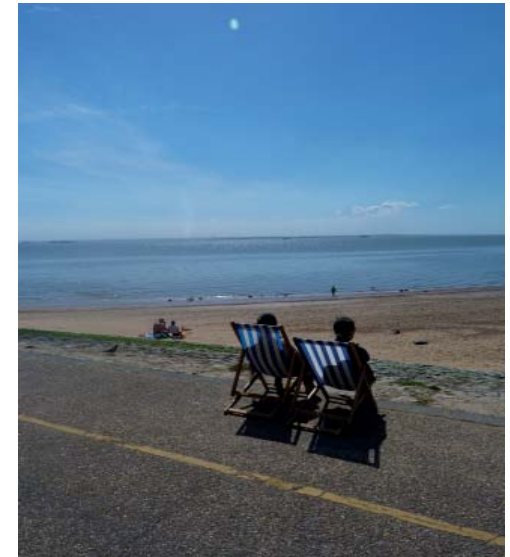
The whole Borough will be alive with cultural experiences and the visitor welcome will be second to none with an offer to support longer stays needing overnight accommodation.

Tourism will be regarded as a proud sector to work in and relevant skills will support the local economy with new, high quality accommodation on offer.

The Borough will be smart enabled with digital technology at its forefront helping visitors find their every need, efficiently.

Measures of success by 2027:

- Destination benchmark survey of 95% or higher
- Growth of volume and value of tourism ahead of national average
- Double numbers of staying visitors





4. Key Themes/ Objectives

Whilst there are multiple projects that impact upon the tourism sector across Southend, five key themes will feature as necessary components for success of this strategy.

i) Communications & Marketing

External communication

By 2027 the external communication and marketing of Southend's tourism offer will be streamlined to provide a coherent and targeted message to segmented consumer groups. A single delivery team will coordinate the activity across a range of partnerships and agendas recognising the collective value of encouraging visitors to the wider local economy.

The annual destination plan will include events and tactical opportunities planned in advance and used to reinforce messages of the offer being a year-round destination resort that needs more than one day to enjoy.

The day visitor market will continue to be reached through marketing channels reminding consumers of the offer at key times and in advance of major events and new developments.

Connecting the wider offer across the Borough and beyond will help position a 'resort' wide approach spreading the value and impact of tourism. Key propositions however such as the beaches, Pier, Adventure Island, nightlife will always factor strongly in messages as these have high consumer recall and resonance.

Linking retail, tourism, culture and the wider area's benefits will develop the two key strategic messages that

will significantly improve that value of tourism - attracting visitors to stay longer and to lengthen the season.

Southend residents

The significance of visiting friends and relatives in the mix of the visitor economy needs to be reflected in the communication strategy. Whilst the focus is to increase economic impact from tourists from outside the area, a clear means for all residents to be reached with targeted 'what's on' information and an understanding of the visitor offer will be in place. Social media links will reach at least 50% of households in the borough by 2027.

With 180,000 residents Southend offers a sustainable year-round destination able to support a varied cultural offer unlike many smaller coastal towns. Maximising the year round programme to grow off peak audiences will be communicated to targeted markets.

Trade communications

The travel trade and group operators will have quarterly updates and Southend will feature in tour programmes from operators in the south East of England.

Southend will work with appropriate partners such as visit Essex to maximise trade communications and build an Essex-wide profile that includes the Southend offer at its heart.

Within the tourism sector in Southend and wider Essex, a monthly newsletter of forthcoming events activities and highlights will increase awareness and enable businesses capable of reaching wider consumer groups through their own promotional routes.



ii) Infrastructure - Getting here and moving around by 2027

Road

Pre arrival information provided on the VisitSouthend website will help ensure visitors have the information needed to plan their stay. Partners across Southend will provide clear information on their own promotional material to assist with the best way to reach their particular destination. Partnership working between the Business Improvement District and the Council will ensure accurate and useful information is provided.

Variable Message System communication and smart city technology will communicate with mobile devices when in the borough so that drivers can be assisted to the optimum routes and find parking locations quickly.

Clear signage will help drivers to find all areas and optimum parking routes efficiently whether seeking the central seafront, blue flag beaches at Shoeburyness and Thorpe Bay or Leigh.

Investment already made in road improvements help to improve access to the central seafront at peak times will be supplemented by park and ride options development and traffic management arrangements to ensure as efficient a journey as possible is achieved.

Council investment planned in 2017/18/19 will have secured additional parking provision in the central area of Southend.

Public parking will be clearly signposted with long stay and short stay locations with pricing tariffs to match expectations and competitive with other destinations of similar demand. Parking provision will have been reviewed and refreshed through a comprehensive parking strategy

to address needs of the visitor economy and to support the growth agenda.

Coaches will be welcomed in Southend with dedicated parking facilities away from the central area but with ample drop off and pick up points at the key seafront and popular locations. Coach operators will be able to make short break tours as part of their programme providing coach groups with itineraries to match needs including history, activities, seaside fun, theatre etc. These overnight packages will enhance the value of tourism from this sector from the traditional day visitors only. Coach group itineraries will be prepared to assist organisers with finding new ways to explore the wider Borough throughout the year.

Disabled groups will be welcomed on our beaches with dedicated facilities at City Beach, Three Shells beach and its lagoon and at Thorpe Bay (Tram Stop shelter). Mobi-chairs supported by Southend Dial will be in place. Disabled drop off bays on City Beach will assist at this busy location where also ramp access to the beach and disabled toilet facilities ensure a welcome for all.

Public transport

Rail partners on both routes to Southend will be key to providing promotional and marketing messages of the destination. They will add value to the travel planning by visitors to the area and moving them around with minimal impact on the road network. A modern fleet of trains running on a reliable network will make travel by train an easy choice. Rail operators will play a key and regular part of the Tourism Partnership.

Promotional offers to reach Southend outside of the peak will deliver our strategic objectives of extending the season throughout the year. Ticket deals will develop to



enable good value ticket prices that provide for visitors to stop overnight.

Smart ticketing and inter-operability between bus and rail operators will enable visitors to easily select public transport as a preference with both ease of access and value for money.

Moving visitors around the borough by rail and also by linking in the cycle network will add to sustainable models of enjoying the area and reduce the impact on road network

Bus operators across the borough will be engaged with the Tourism Partnership to link travel promotion and provide options for residents and visitors to explore the area. Cycling will also be promoted to visitors as a way to explore the wider borough once here.

Staying for a short break in Southend using public transport will be made easy with ticketing options allowing overnight visits.

Sea

Southend Pier will be a gateway for visiting ships and craft providing access by water in an increasingly congested national road network. Leisure arrivals and links to London by water will be a premium and relaxing way to access the visitor offer at Southend.

Further work towards a Southend Marina will be developing, adding significant value from the private yacht market to the local economy supporting associated supply chain sector.

Leigh on Sea's ability to welcome visiting yachts will be well known and the Council's recent investment in the areas infrastructure and wharves will attract regular visitors. The North Thames Fisheries Local Action Group (NTFLAG) supporting a thriving port at Leigh-on-Sea will link to cultural and tourism projects to boost the local economy.

Air

Passengers passing through London Southend Airport (LSA) will understand that they are not just at an international transport hub but are entering a destination in its own right.

Whether recognising the opportunity for a future visit to Southend by domestic travellers heading abroad or capturing the interest of inbound tourists to visit the area in future, the Airport will present Southend's visitor offer linking messages to key attractions and joint brand values. The brands will connect to create stand-out positioning for both the airport and the resort of Southend to reinforce the synergies and quality of offer.

European city locations served by the airport will be familiar with the Southend proposition and touch down space for any businesses seeking trade with London and the UK market will be promoted.

Digital

Visitors to Southend will experience free wifi across key sections of the destination. Use of our destination app will help visitors to be fully aware of the benefits in the Borough pre-arrival and once on site with the ability to pre book hotels, meals and attractions, cultural experiences and even parking. Digital tourism in Southend will support the increased awareness of the wider offer.

Data from mobile devices will be tracked and enable onward communication with visitors through the borough's network due to be installed in 2017.

Big Data will be understood and used to acquire more 'like minded' visitors.

Technology through the smart city agenda will allow targeted management of bins, movement of traffic and people and link to messaging of the variable message system across the borough to manage traffic and signalling.



iii) Destination Development

The attraction of Southend as a visitor destination with its natural seaside offer and traditional attractions for family fun will continue to inspire day trips from the local catchment and London. Continued investment in the core seaside offer in the public realm will support tourism businesses and attract day and longer staying consumer markets. Awareness of a broader and higher quality offer across the whole 'resort' area will inspire visitors to stay longer and attract those from further afield.

Southend Pier by 2027 will be welcoming 1 million visitors per year with a renewed offer at the shore. An improved transport offer will allow easy access to the Pier Head and a range of leisure options there will enable longer visits and enjoyment. The Pier offer will include a mix of retail and entertainment utilising interactive technology to enhance the visitor offer and link with other attractions across the town and in particular the Cliff Lift, conservation area and new seafront visitor attraction (Thames Estuary Experience). This will ensure that visitors understand there is more than they can possibly do in one day encouraging longer staying visits. Improved access, additional facilities and more covered areas on the Pier will provide year round attraction opportunities along with an event programme to maintain interest by new markets. The Borough Council invests significant funds to ensure that the Pier infrastructure remains fit for purpose.

The Pier Museum will be promoted and linked more closely to the Pier offer making a seamless experience for the visitor.

Retail and the town centre environment will be transformed to be recognised regionally as a great place for events led entertainment and therefore high footfall. Consumer trends are constantly changing with 'Digital High Streets' evolving, providing interaction and omni-channel options, whether it's store, online, TV and any new technologies appearing on the horizon. Therefore town centres cannot rely on retail alone. High Streets will have to become meeting places once more, where education, leisure, health and housing meets local needs.

Southend town centre has already started to put good building blocks in place with community functions, such as libraries, art galleries, education, health centres and leisure activities as part of the current offer with multi million pound investment from the Council and academic sectors. It recognises the need to be more inclusive and build strong communities, improving the infrastructure to reflect future changes and enable good connectivity. The success of the Business Improvement District, (Southend BID) trading since April 2013, has allowed businesses and the local authority to work together to improve the local economy and deliver additional services.

These evolutionary challenges will continue to be met with good leadership and partnership working between local authority, business, academic sector and community groups to safeguard everyone's needs. The High Street environment will be developed to provide more opportunities for dwell time and improved public realm with particular focus on new paving scheme to enhance the offer

The London Road end of Southend High Street will be transformed to incorporate planting and improved spaces with provision for the development of a changing market space to encourage a diverse and eclectic offer. Other retail areas in the borough similarly will develop their offer to remain vibrant and offering a complementary visitor offer.

City Beach has demonstrated significant improvements to the enjoyment of the central seafront area in particular the fountains have helped increase visitor stays and added to the local economy by providing water play at all states of the tide.

The new **lagoon** opened in 2016 and saw yet further opportunities for to increase dwell time at the sea front. In 2017 the associated new toilet block will open and there will be improved landscaping and public space adding more capacity for visitors to enjoy this part of the seafront.

Plans to develop **City Beach** phase 2 will focus on the space west of the Pier lagoon and provide outstanding public realm for this part of the seafront currently under-developed. Progress towards developing west will make a well-planned link to the new Thames Estuary Experience in the cliffs which also provides a year-round offer to visitors from the wider region. The internationally relevant stories of The Thames Estuary, HMS London and Saxon England will be presented in an exciting and interactive format in this new attraction on the Seafront.

Adventure Island is the largest single attraction in the area drawing in vast numbers of visitors to the town in its own right. The brand recognition, investment and customer base has supported continuing growth and the owners' desire for improving the offer gives confidence to the wider seafront community. The Tourism Partnership and Council will work closely with Stockvale and meet regularly to identify opportunities and develop the extension of the season.

Sealife Adventure also owned by Stockvale offers a year round attraction for residents and visitors and continues to refresh its appeal to welcome new and repeat visitors. Expansion of the offer in 2017 to include new features have shown the centre's appetite to inspire more visitors. Links with the University of Essex and marine biology also add to a high value skills mix within the sector.

Southend's museums and planetarium operated by the Council will link more closely to the visitor offer providing a continuing mix of reasons to visit Southend throughout the year. Increased awareness of the events taking place that bring history to life along with improved awareness of the exhibition programme through the links to the local business community will give visitors diverse options to enjoy Southend whatever the weather. Itineraries for visitors arriving as groups or individuals will be available via web based applications and experiencing historic venues such as Prittlewell Priory and Southchurch Hall will be strongly promoted as part of the offer. The developing programme for a new Thames Estuary attraction on the seafront will link the wider museums offer encouraging longer stays and increased dwell time.

Seaway multiplex cinema development will add a year-round leisure offer in the central seafront adding footfall opportunities pre and post film screenings for the tourism businesses on the seafront. This additional feature will provide an enviable year round attraction supporting longer dwell times for visitors and residents in this location throughout the year.

Hotel development in Southend will be supported to increase the value of tourist visits and offer more choices for visitors, Boutique independent hotels and national brands will facilitate year round business tourism and conferences. A focus on attracting conference delegates to Southend to enhance the value of tourism and broaden the seasonal offer will be established through the tourism partnership network.

The **Roslin Beach Hotel** will be a 5 star venue providing the best quality assured accommodation in Essex.

Thorpe Bay's excellent water conditions will be complemented by continued accreditation by the coastal awards and blue flags or equivalent standards.

Southend United FC will have developed a new ground offering facilities for top quality football along with a wider destination led retail / leisure offer including conference facilities attracting new and year round visitor facilities supporting business tourism and the wider destination.



Casinos, Theatres and night life Southend's night time offer will provide considerable draw for visitors to need to stay overnight. The casinos will have continued to diversify their appeal into the wider leisure offer. Investment in the theatres will have ensured they are prepared for the long term providing both major regional theatre shows attracting audiences from overseas as well as the regional catchment.

Essex University and South Essex College campus in the central area will link to the tourism sector for skills development. A tourism degree will be established for study via UoE's business school and will provide high quality practical experience for students in addition to post-graduate employment opportunities. Students from UoE Edge Hotel school will help develop projects and programmes for tourism in the area and International conferences tailored to destination management will be a regular feature on the annual calendar of events.

Nature and wider offer the leisure, open spaces, nature reserves and parks will be linked together with the existing cluster of offers in the Borough to create a haven for the nature lover making experiential breaks to discover enjoy the 'discovery coast' linking to work with the county partnership's - (visit-Essex) key theme.

Leigh-on-Sea and Shoeburyness

This tourism strategy includes clear actions and references to both Shoeburyness and Leigh-on-Sea as destinations in their own right but part of the overarching Borough of Southend-on-Sea. Both contribute to the diversity of offer for visitors and help to widen the tourist experience and economic impact. What is good for the local economy and tourism sector in Leigh and Shoeburyness will add

value for the whole economy and tourism sector in Southend.

Leigh-on-Sea is relatively affluent and has a good local economic mix and sense of place that appeals to locals and visitors alike. It is a visitor destination in its own right. This is based on the appeal of Old Leigh as an active fishing port and historic centre, quality independent shops offer and thriving hospitality sector. However it is important for all partners to reflect on the potential challenges that this successful economic mix faces – threats to the very survival of the port and the fishing industry, higher rents for small businesses, need for start-up space etc. The emergence of the NTFLAG in Leigh-on-Sea offers a chance to properly analyse the challenges to the port and the industry, and to provide insight into how tourism is related to these cornerstones of the area's cultural identity. More work probably needs to take place on developing the heritage offer of the area (including interpretation).

Shoeburyness's offer for visitors is less well defined than that of Leigh's. There is a clear need to promote the area better both to incoming visitors and local communities. Gunners Park is becoming more popular as a destination, and investment in the Garrison has helped to preserve the unique heritage of the area as well as supporting the local economy. What is lacking is a sense of a destination point for visitors, communities and schools, and this is something that the Shoeburyness CCT has been focusing on through the efforts to progress the Cart & Wagon Shed into a Heritage Centre. Potential impact from improved heritage interpretation of the military and more ancient heritage of the area will be developed during the lifetime of this strategy and actions towards this are referenced in the



section of this strategy. The development of new facilities and events can have on the local economy is being explored currently through the Government funded Community Economic Development (CED) programme through the Shoeburyness CCT and Cultural Engine.

Below we explore some of the key issues relevant to a Borough Wide Tourism strategy covered in the Economic Plans for Leigh-on-Sea and Shoeburyness CCTs.

Shoeburyness CCT Economic Plan

'The Vision' for Shoeburyness is that the area is promoted and recognised as a Coastal Park with a range of quality natural, cultural and heritage assets, with thriving local businesses and resilient local economy, excellent transport links and community facilities.

The Vision of Shoeburyness will ensure that the area contributes to the overall offer that the whole Borough of Southend has for visitors and residents.

The Economic Plan recognises that developing the offer for visitors to Shoeburyness is an important driver for the local economy, and the wider Southend economy. The Vision, centered around a coastal 'Country Park' concept builds on previous work relevant to regeneration.

- Southend Regeneration Framework 2007-2021: This document recognised the 'country park' concept and how this fed into supporting local economic resilience and an 'exemplar village centre'
- South Essex Greengrid: Shoeburyness, and Gunners Park in particular, recognised as a 'strategic destination' with excellent views across the Estuary
- Urban Habitats and Three Rivers Trail: EU Interreg IVA project that recognised Shoeburyness as an important destination with a wealth of green space and strong coastal identity.

The Shoeburyness CCT has six Key Themes. Those most relevant to the Tourism Strategy are listed below:

- Key Theme 1: Develop the Coastal Park Brand and Destination Management Plan

- Key Theme 2: Develop the Heritage and Cultural Offer and Interpretation
- Key Theme 3: Enhancements to Green and Open Spaces
- Key Theme 5: Develop a strategic approach to Transport

The projects to emerge from the Themes are obviously related to developing the Cart & Wagon Shed as the key publically owned heritage and cultural asset that is right at the heart of the visitor area (Gunners Park near the Garrison with easy access to estuary views and not far from East Beach). The Cart & Wagon Shed can become an initial hub for activity relating to heritage interpretation and education for example.

Improving and promoting the wider green space offer of Shoeburyness (as well as the beaches) is also important to a rounded visitor offer, and understanding how important it is to promote travel by train and bicycle to Shoeburyness is also important. The area also has many car parks which are relatively under-utilised compared to Southend's central sites at peak times.

To develop the Carriage & Wagon Shed the Shoeburyness CCT has supported the establishment of a new not-for-profit company – Shoebury Coastal CIC – with a remit to develop the business plan and wider interpretation strategy for the area, lease the building from Southend Council and work with all partners to secure the funding needed to get the building open for heritage interpretation, archives, community facilities, education space and a café/food offer. Shoebury Coastal CIC creates new capacity for supporting tourism strategies and taking on projects in the area.

The Poppies Wave installation by 14-18Now on Barge Pier at Gunners Park provided a significant interest in the heritage of the area, and volunteer and visitor numbers during this project has shown what can be developed for a tourism destination at this site. This will be delivered in partnership during 2017 and will provide a solid opportunity to explore further initiatives in the area.

Essex Wildlife Trust are an important partner at Shoeburyness for the CCT and for tourism as they manage significant areas of Gunners Park and the nature reserve, and they will also take responsibility for a number of the heritage buildings at Gunners Park.

Leigh-on-Sea Economic Plan

'A thriving local area which celebrates its long fishing and maritime heritage, recognising the primary importance of the port and fisheries industries to the cultural, economic and environmental vibrancy of Leigh. A strong and resilient local economy with an excellent offer for visitors, residents and business.'

The Leigh-on-Sea Economic Plan has identified 6 Objectives, all of which relate to the Borough Wide Tourism Strategy

Objective 1: Ensure the future sustainability of Old Leigh as an active Fishing Port

Objective 2: Enhance the cultural and heritage offer of Leigh-on-Sea

Objective 3: Local business initiatives and support the local economic resilience of Leigh

Objective 4: Ensure that Leigh has the highest quality open spaces and public realm and community facilities

Objective 5: Produce a Destination Management Plan and promotion of local offer to visitors

Objective 6: Work with partners to achieve a coherent approach to transport to support the local economy

Unlike Shoeburyness, there are a number of different formally constituted organisations in Leigh that play a key role taking forward the above Objectives. These include Leigh Town Council, Leigh Society, Leigh Port Partnership, Leigh Maritime CIC and fishing/cockling representative groups. All are represented on the CCT.

The emergence of the North Thames Fishing Local Action Group (FLAG) that is largely focused on Leigh is an opportunity to secure the future of the port and the fishing industry, and this therefore is directly relevant to tourism in the area. The FLAG does have a focus on Culture & Heritage, although the majority of funding is likely to go on feasibility work on infrastructure challenges, as well as on marketing and promotion of the fishing catch (Leigh Cockles in particular). This is therefore also very relevant to tourism (local produce, local distinctiveness).

A new Leigh Heritage Centre to improve / update the offer for visitors and develop a digital town trail concept to encourage people to explore the area was part of a recent funding bid and remains a priority.

v) Make Southend Sparkle

Southend will offer a high quality, service led welcome across all touchpoints and customer service arenas.

A programme of support for the industry will be in place to provide a consistent approach to customer service. Taxi drivers, public transport and hospitality sector workforce will all be aware of the Southend tourism product and confident of talking about and helping their customers find what they need.

Visitors will be welcomed by trained customer focused volunteers at multiple locations such as the high street, parks, museums, public spaces and transport hubs.

Travel and tourism graduates, course leaders and students at the campus will work with the tourism sector to link skills development to the local economy. Southend will be renowned for its friendly welcome and the nature of engagement with visitors.

A welcome programme based on the 'Raving Fans' model where our customers and visitors are provided with such outstanding service across the destination that perceptions of visiting Southend are exceptional.

iv) Events and cultural tourism

An eclectic events programme throughout the year will bring new audiences to experience the Southend-on-Sea offer.

Well managed and safe major events will continue to be facilitated in appropriate key locations using the breadth of the borough's offer and spreading the economic impact across the year. The seafront's unique selling points will be the focus for many events such as fireworks displays and regatta's etc. Organisers will be directed to ensure the seafront remains open for business and that events need to support the economy.

Southend's National Portfolio Organisations recognised by the Arts Council - Focal Point Gallery and METAL - will spearhead cultural activity to inspire participation and deliver an inclusive and wide ranging programme. They will ensure that the programme of events are edgy, fun and engaging and attract significant media coverage to challenge historic perceptions of the area. Other gallery spaces will host exhibitions to enliven the offer and encourage repeat visits.

Cultural tourism visits will be making an increased impact within the mix of visitors choosing Southend, which itself will be as recognised as the East of England's cultural capital.

External cultural organisations will recognise the massive benefit of the strong cluster of creative businesses thriving in the area and the support network that they offer.

Galleries, museums and venues will be alive with performance to bring exhibitions to life and animate the

experience. Dwell times as a result will be high ensuring consumers are able to stay longer, spending more. Southend will be recognised for its cultural assets far beyond its own resident population.

The High Street offer will target increased footfall through an exciting range of markets and events to maintain continued relevance to changing shopper behaviours.

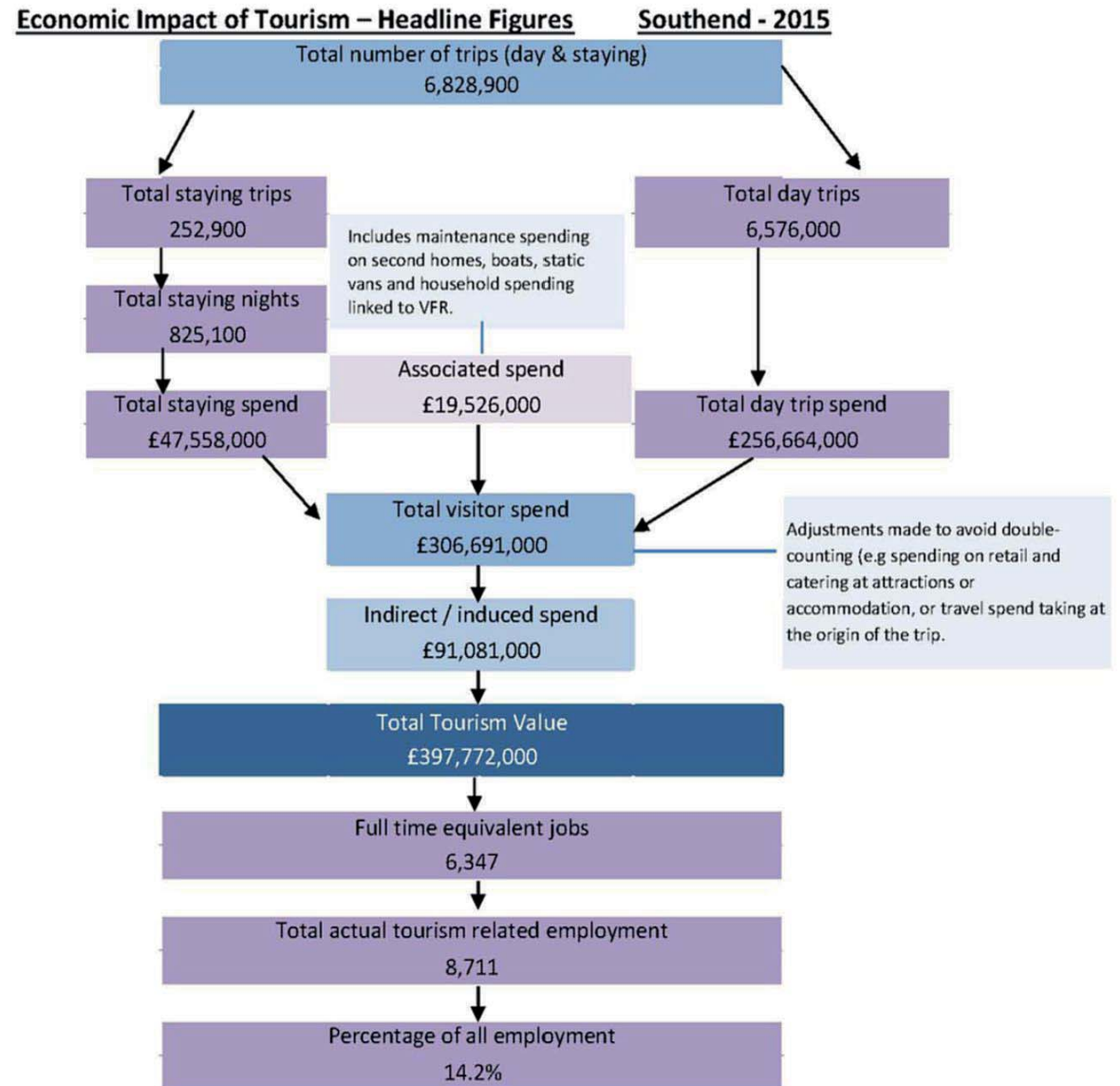
Public Parks and the foreshore will provide venues for visitors to enjoy outdoor activities to enrich their lives. Visiting friends and relatives will be presented with Southend's open spaces by proud residents. The open spaces will be professionally managed, cleaned to a high standard and operate a volunteer programme to ensure collective ownership by the community.





5. Benchmark

Southend's visitor offer was benchmarked with an industry standard qualitative destination review in the summer of 2016. Whilst this is only a single measure and a snapshot of a particular time it acts as a useful starting point in determining progress during the life of the strategy of how the destination 'feels' to a visitor. There are also statistics available from 2015 outlining the volume and value of tourism to the economy to use as the base information as shown below.



	Accommodation	Shopping	Food & Drink	Attractions	Travel	Total
UK Tourists	£10,085,000	£3,825,000	£8,102,000	£3,141,000	£6,572,000	£31,725,000
Overseas Tourists	£4,178,000	£4,569,000	£3,611,000	£1,852,000	£1,622,000	£15,832,000
Total Staying	£14,263,000	£3,394,000	£11,713,000	£4,993,000	£8,194,000	£47,557,000
Total Staying %	30%	18%	25%	10%	17%	100%
Total Day Visitors	£0	£92,738,000	£104,045,000	£25,431,000	£34,449,000	£256,663,000
Total Day Visitors	0%	36%	41%	10%	13%	100%
Total 2015	£14,263,000	£101,132,000	£115,758,000	£30,424,000	£42,643,000	£304,220,000
%	5%	33%	38%	10%	14%	100%
Comparison	£13,823,000	£96,862,000	£110,965,000	£29,096,000	£40,866,000	£291,612,000
Difference	3%	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%

Destination review scores based on visits in summer 2016.

Aspect	High Street	Seafront
General	88%	87%
Market	91%	N/A
Toilets	50%	75%
Retail and Catering	86%	85%
Information Provision	N/A	64%
Overall Score	79%	78%

Aspect	Museums
	88%
Arrival	91%
Sold Experience	50%
Facilities	86%
Pre-visit	N/A
Overall Score	79%

6. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring the success of the strategy should take place against a set of performance indicators. The table below shows a range of objectives and indicators to reflect progress over time.

Objectives	Key Tasks	Monitoring	Target
Objective 1: increase the volume and value of tourism and jobs supported by tourism activity.	Attract more domestic and overseas staying visitors	Number of visits by domestic and overseas residents	Improve from 4% to 8% by 2027
	Improve productivity of the local tourism economy (business turnover)	Total value of tourism	6% growth annually
	Increase the employment in tourism and tourism related businesses (direct and indirect employment)	Tourism related jobs (direct and indirect)	3% growth annually
	Visitor counts at key attractions (incl. cultural sites managed by SBC)	Visitor counts	4% growth annually
Objective 2: To raise the profile of Southend-on-Sea as a visitor destination	Performance of destination website	Unique visitors and dwell time	Increase unique website visitors each year
	Social media presence (twitter followers, Facebook likes, etc.)	Count	Increase social media followers and interaction
Objective 3: Enhance quality and distinctiveness of the tourism product	Number new accommodation bedrooms	Undertake / update hotel capacity analysis	created 500 new bedspaces by 2027
	Number of establishments with Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence	Count	increase annually
	Number of green flags / purple flag accreditation and scores	Count	Maintain current standard
	Number of national accredited beaches	Count of beaches	Increase to Four Blue flags

Objectives	Key Tasks	Monitoring	Target
Objective 4: Improve levels of awareness and satisfaction	Mystery shopper and destination appeal	Undertake regular destination wide survey of visitors	improve visitor satisfaction levels from 79% to 95%
	Visitors - understanding motivations, barriers, needs and expectations among current visitors	British Destinations membership	Top ranking for key indicators among similar type destinations
New Products: performance benchmarking	Develop theme packages to reach new consumers on experience based breaks	Product development itineraries, sales and feedback	10 new itineraries ,1000 new visitors (short break)



7. 2017 Destination Action Plan

Within the five themes of this strategy an annual action plan will highlight activity to deliver the overarching objectives. These actions are summarised below.

Theme 1 – Communications and marketing

Joined up 'place making' communication programme for 2017 – events guide, destination guide to be published

Further integration of visit southend platforms with Southend BID leading – reducing websites

Events guide co-ordinated in partnership with the Southend BID and Council will be distributed to high footfall collection points and replicated on visit-southend.

Tourism organisations will add their own content to ensure that the web events programme is up to date and populated effectively.

Visit Southend brand marketing material will be prominently displayed at Airport in a campaign

Visit Southend and partner facebook sites will use seasonal 'films' produced in 2016 to promote the destination.

Monthly e-newsletter of events to tourism stakeholders will be sent out

Door-drop communication of all Southend households with key events

PR messages and themes to be issued each month targeting new audiences
Londen aan zee exhibition to take place in Groningen

Attend excursions exhibition to promote destination to the group / coach offer.

Promotional activity with bus operators to link non-car explanation of the area

Promotional plan with both rail companies to highlight Southend offer and arrival by train

Tourism conference and networking event for stakeholders to be delivered UofE hospitality students to review Southend marketing activity with recommendations fed back to Southend Tourism Partnership.

Understanding brand essence in partnership with EU funded visit Essex project to enable better communications programme in future years.

Theme 2 infrastructure

Roads – Investment of £5M at Kent Elms improve traffic flows on A127 access road - SBC

Council parking strategy and visitor access management plan will be completed informing improved options for access to Southend car parks and tourism offer

Council budget to include feasibility on new central area parking options
Rail – widget for booking tickets added to visit southend – SBC / Greater Anglia

Train rolling stock improvements to both lines underway C2C / Greater Anglia

New Coach park offer and drop off / pick up points to be developed

Theme 3 Destination development

Pier pavilion technical design work to be commissioned (SBC)

Pier Shelters, decking and toilet programme to be delivered (SBC)

Pier entrance to be enhanced, rickshaw offer and pier craft units introduced. (SBC)

New shelter on City Beach seafront to be installed (SBC)

New gallery space to be developed at Pier Arches (SBC)

Thames Estuary Experience (new museum) design review to be completed and preparation for gateway review (SBC)

Jazz centre to be developed at Beecroft basement level and plans for next stage to be presented. JCUK/SBC)

Seaway development planning application (Turnstone)

Develop Carriage and Wagon Shed for visitor / heritage centre (Shoebury CIC)

New boutique hotel to open

Roslin Hotel preparations for 5 star accreditation

New meerkat, otter and penguin attraction at Sealife Adventure
Dashboard understanding of destination (Visit Essex – EU funded)

Brand essence research – (visit Essex EU funded_

Theme 4 Make Southend Sparkle

Customer service training plan (raving fans) to be developed –

Volunteer programme implemented with Poppies exhibition (SBC)

Develop existing volunteering programme to welcome visitors – Council museums (SBC)

Engage college lecturers with student project to involve in DMO activity (UofE SEC / SBC)

Establish customer service project with Hospitality post graduates at Edge (UoE)

Theme v Events

Cultural artport exhibition (FPG / AIRPORT)

New event – Festival of two wheels (BID/ SBC / KIWI)

New food festival based event (Carnival)

Alternative City of culture programme and associated events delivered (Sir David Amess & Team)

Radical Essex programme delivered (FPG)

125 Anniversary / 100 years of Priory events to be delivered (SBC/ METAL)

Poppies Wave commemoration to be delivered (SBC)

New Jazz festival development (JCUK)

New open air cinema screening (Pinewood / ACC17)

2018 indicative Action plan

Improvement of The Bell junction of £5M to improve access to Southend A127. (SBC)

Implementation of additional central parking provision (SBC £5M over 2 years)

Exhibition / promotional activity with the network of overseas routes developed through Southend Airport. (LSA)

Enhancement of Greater Anglia rolling stock implementation.

Tourism degree course students in first year (Uof E)

'Estuary 18' festival delivered to highlight the developing Thames Experience programme (METAL)





