



ANNUAL REVIEW

2019

A MESSAGE FROM MARTHA LYTTON-COBOLD, CHAIR VISIT HERTS

After a turbulent political year in 2019, our industry now faces an even greater challenge. The outbreak of Covid-19 is the biggest threat to our industry and our county in peace-time. The disruption to business and our daily lives will be considerable with long-lasting implications for our county and economy.

Our vibrant visitor economy brings much needed revenue to our county – delivering 28 million visitors and £2 billion to Herts each year. We provide 1 in 10 of all jobs in the county and are proud to be the fastest growing service sector in the UK. Supporting this important industry is critical to our economy, our communities and our people. That is why we, and colleagues across the industry, pressed the Government to do all it can to support businesses during this difficult time. As a result, the Chancellor has announced a £300 billion package of support to support the UK economy. We at Visit Herts will ensure that our businesses have all the advice and information they need to access this important lifeline.

Although these are extremely challenging times, we must remember that we have faced adversity in the past. The industry has battled Foot and Mouth, SARS, Ash-cloud, to name but a few. Covid-19 may be the greatest of these challenges, but I am confident that our destination is strong enough to survive these difficult months and to rebuild, stronger than ever.

Over the past year the team at Visit Herts have worked hard to support businesses in developing new and exciting tourism products and taking that to market. Our success in securing funding through Visit England's Discover England Fund has enabled us to lead one project (Gourmet Garden Trails), and work with partner destinations on two further projects (US Connections and The Explorer's Road). Developing and promoting Hertfordshire's fantastic food and drink product, our spectacular gardens and innovative visitor experiences through the Gourmet Garden Trails project has been fascinating. We are thrilled with the engagement which we have received from businesses and tour operators alike.

Growing our international visitor numbers remains a priority and our travel trade team have enjoyed another year of successfully engaging with inbound operators from 20 overseas markets, developing new partnerships to raise awareness and sales of our regional product.

Our content-led marketing strategy grew from strength-to-strength this year, with our inspirational features now accounting for 25% of total website traffic. We hosted three competitions with partners on our digital channels over the last 12 months, with the grand finale being our annual Advent Calendar running in December. The competition benefitted from over 4,500 entries, and generated over 15,600 page-views, making it Visit Herts' most successful competition to date, and we are looking forward to building on these successes as part of two extended seasonal campaigns this coming year.

We finished 2019 in style, celebrating Hertfordshire's finest tourism businesses at the third annual Herts Tourism Awards, held at the Hotel Cromwell in Stevenage. From wonderful food and drink providers to exciting attractions, we announced a fantastic selection of deserving prizewinners – all of whom are providing a world-class service to our customers, and really helping to grow the economy in Hertfordshire.

And finally, we were thrilled to welcome the following new partners to the Visit Herts family last year; Mercure St Albans Noke Hotel, Farnhams Hall, St Pauls Walden Bury, Rye House Group, Aylett Nurseries, Bricklayers Arms, and intu Watford. We're incredibly excited to showcase your wonderful tourism businesses and everything that you have to offer our visitors.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our amazing Visit Herts team, and in particular all of our partners for the support and engagement within all areas of our organisation. Whether it's through your attendance at our quarterly networking events, regular event and content submissions, investment in our seasonal campaigns or feeding into our monthly Business Barometer, we greatly value your on-going backing and collaboration. We would certainly not be able to keep growing our economy and welcoming more visitors to your wonderful businesses and attractions without these partnerships.

On behalf of the Partnership Group, and all at Visit Herts, I would like to assure you of our continued support during the challenging year ahead. We look forward to working with you to rebuild our vibrant economy and to welcome visitors back to our beautiful county.



MARTHA LYTTON-COBOLD
CHAIR

A MESSAGE FROM DEIRDRE WELLS OBE CHIEF EXECUTIVE VISIT HERTS

At a time when our industry faces its greatest challenge yet, our support for and collaboration with partners is more important than ever. Ensuring that the interests of our businesses are represented at the highest level remains our key priority. We are privileged to have a seat at the key national meetings with Government and will work tirelessly to ensure that your views are represented. This direct link to Government and our strong relationship with the new Tourism Minister, Nigel Huddleston, means that we are able to provide you with up to the minute information and business support. Our industry is strong and a major contributor to the Herts and UK economy. Getting the sector back on its feet as quickly as possible is critical to protect our vibrant industry.

When lobbying politicians, I always find it handy to have one on one's doorstep. So, we were delighted to hear of the appointment of Oliver Dowden MP as Secretary of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The self-styled "MP for Albert Square" will find that he has a microcosm of his portfolio right here in his backyard. World-class creative industries and culture? Exciting inward investment and innovation? We have it all here in Hertfordshire, Secretary of State, and we look forward to welcoming you to showcase just how important these industries and the visitor economy which serves them can be in delivering high quality jobs and economic growth to our county.

It is clear that there is huge, and growing demand for Herts as a destination. Our stunning countryside, outstanding cultural heritage and world-class attractions mean that we have a strong foundation on which to build our recovery. Hertfordshire Year of Culture 2020 provides us with an unprecedented opportunity to showcase the wealth of culture and heritage which the county has to offer and to engage businesses and communities alike in the huge range of exciting activities which are planned for the year. 2020 also celebrates the centenary of our famous garden city – Welwyn. At a time when there is huge focus and national discussion on "place-making" and how to develop thriving communities, there is much for planners and politicians alike to learn from the esteemed Sir Ebenezer Howard and his innovative approach to building beautiful and sustainable places. I know that many of the events which have been planned may need to be postponed or reconfigured and we stand ready to do all we can to make sure that they will be a success. I know too that, alongside the challenges, there will be inspiring stories of the businesses who are going the extra mile – who are putting the Heart into Herts, if you will – and we look forward to celebrating them too.

As a county which effortlessly hosted the NATO Summit (congrats again to The Grove) we have demonstrated our ability to handle even the most demanding of our business visitors! Building on that success, we will be launching a Meetings Incentives Conferences and Events partnership to capitalise on this high-spending market and showcase our superb accommodation and world-class venues.

As we approach another great anniversary – can you believe that next year it will be 20 years since the first Harry Potter film was released? – we have an unprecedented opportunity to promote ourselves as the film capital of the UK. Whether it's our world-class studios, including the exciting new proposed Sky Studios development at Elstree, which attract a highly talented cast and crew; the first-class locations and the opportunity to attract so called set-jet tourists. Screen Tourism provides an enormous opportunity to raise the profile of our destination and deliver sustainable, year-round growth to our destination.

There is no doubt that 2020 will be a challenging year for the county. But I am confident with the support of partners across the county we can re-emerge stronger than ever. My thanks to all our investors for their huge support and for continuing to provide a world-class welcome to our visitors. A special thanks to Dan Dark, SVP & Managing Director, Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden, who stood down as our Co-Chair this year and was instrumental in setting up Visit Herts as well as being a long-standing supporter of the county's visitor economy. We are delighted that Martha Lytton-Cobbold will continue as Chair alongside her busy role leading one of our flagship attractions, Knebworth House. I am confident that together, with the continued support of Hertfordshire County Council, Hertfordshire LEP, our district council partners and businesses across the county, we can re-emerge stronger than ever. My thanks to all our investors for their huge support and for continuing to provide a world-class welcome to our visitors.

We are proud to support our wonderful destination and the thousands of businesses that make up our industry. As we face a difficult few months, we can draw inspiration from our local hero, Albus Dumbledore, who said "Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light."



DEIRDRE WELLS OBE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE



PLACEMAKING AND LOBBYING

With a seat at the table on many national, international and local industry forums, our lobbying efforts are having greater influence than ever before.

Our active involvement in various cultural and economic development forums, as well as our close relationships with Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and local authorities is helping to shape the county as the place to live, work, study and invest.

VISIT HERTS

73 meetings with senior industry figures

112 letters to government and MPs

23 presentations at high profile events

A selection of new quality of life placemaking infographics developed

County tours with the Chair and Co-Chair of Hertfordshire County Council



BUILDING VALUE THROUGH MARKETING

Our engaging content and partnership campaigns are designed to inspire visits to Herts and drive demand to our businesses.

We help our partners to reach new audiences and align them with complementary products to create cross-sell opportunities.

VISIT HERTS

Delivering the destination message across our digital content, social media channels, press and campaign activity sits at the heart of our marketing.

87% of investor partners were satisfied with the work Visit Herts deliver and this representing good value for money.



CAMPAIGNS

The Winter in Herts competition has established itself as a key piece of our marketing activity. In 2019 it generated more entries, web traffic and newsletter opt-ins than ever before.

In 2019 the Herts Big Weekend continued to grow and gave even more residents the opportunity to enjoy the amazing experiences on their doorstep.

Winter in Herts

15,684 views to the competition pages

4,522 competition entries **(+16%)**

108,750 impressions on social media

Herts Big Weekend

3,418 pairs of tickets

59,296 applications

100,000+ page views



WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The right content, to the right people, on the right channel at the right time.

Our comprehensive content schedule continues to deliver engaging features and posts across all of our channels. Showcasing the amazing experiences provided by our partners and across the destination.

Drawing from our marketing strategy we place the visitor firmly at the heart of everything we create.

Website

156,404 website users (+23%)

Users spent over **5,314 hours** viewing content

Our features accounted for **25.2%** of all page views

50+ features published

Social Channels

11,884 Facebook engagements (+40%)

22,296 Instagram engagements (+70%)

2,578 Twitter followers (+26%)



@mark_and_willowdog

PRESS AND NEWSLETTERS

Proactive PR and communications remains a key strength at Visit Herts.

This year saw us achieve some strong coverage and reach as we to share the story of Hertfordshire's incredible visitor offer.

Our newsletters continue to delight our audience and drive them to our website to discover more.

Press and PR

£74,965 Annual ad value

10 press releases issued
achieving press coverage reach
of **799,712**

5+ broadcast interviews

Newsletters

68,327 emails delivered

29 individual consumer
newsletters

Our newsletters achieved an
average open rate of **30%** and a
click through rate of **7%**
(Industry standard is 20.4% and
2.25%)



BUILDING VALUE THROUGH OUR NETWORKS

Visit Herts brings together businesses to create collaborative opportunities for our partners. We support businesses to develop new products, promote, and distribute them under a strong destination brand.

Everything we do is lead by insights and intelligence to ensure we are tapping into emerging industry trends and delivering activity that will have a positive impact on your business.

VISIT HERTS

87% of investor partners felt their involvement with Visit Herts was a key part of their business strategy

66% of partners felt that Visit Herts are 'effective' or 'very effective' at supporting tourism businesses to develop and grow and supporting local communities.



BUSINESS SUPPORT

Our Destination Managers are focussed on understanding the priorities of your business and destination so that we can tailor our activity to your needs.

Our sector-specific resources and insights provide you with the tools you need to grow your business and understand the market, our forums help businesses to share best practice and collaborate.

VISIT HERTS

111 One to one meetings with businesses

19 forums and training events organised or facilitated

52 forums and events attended

1 new B2B business website launched
www.visithertsbusiness.co.uk

12 days spent hot desking with District Council partners

14 District Officers and Destination Partners attended a full day workshop and speed dating with the VH team



BUSINESS NETWORKING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Over the last year, our online B2B channels continued to deliver key business and industry updates from the sector to our partners across the county.

Our networking events are firmly established as the leading opportunity for businesses to network with colleagues from across the sector.

330 attendees across our quarterly networking events

60+ business to business communications sent to a database of **1,909 contacts**

60 new followers on our LinkedIn channel

56 entries for the 2019 Herts Tourism Awards and **26** mystery shopper visits

Visit Herts welcomed **7** new investor partners



TRAVEL TRADE

2019 saw Visit Herts increase the awareness of the destination with trade partners.

We achieved this through attendance at travel trade events and exhibitions, developing and launching our brand new online travel trade hub and continuing to nurture relationships with key tour operator partners through familiarisation trips and 1:1 meetings.

Through our strong contacts in key markets, Visit Herts continuously tracks emerging trends and then works with destination partners to curate and deliver this product to market.

VISIT HERTS

116 recommendations of Herts businesses made to the travel trade

3 dedicated fam trips, particularly based around Gourmet Garden Trails, which saw over **5** separate tour operators experience product in the county

Over **1,100** miles travelled to meet with over **144** trade contacts at **5** trade events



RESEARCH AND INSIGHTS

Our research is informing the development of our consumer strategy, working closely with the marketing team to identify the best ways of using these insights to support our campaigns and the wider activity.

Improvements to the business barometer continued, in line with national trends and industry feedback. We are working closely with regional and national bodies to access the latest reports and trends, cascading timely and useful information to our stakeholders.

90+ businesses contributing to the Business Barometer

Contribution to **3** research forums with national bodies

13 research reports written to support core delivery



DISCOVER ENGLAND FUND PROJECTS

Visit Herts continued to develop new inspirational product through VisitEngland's Discover England fund. Over the last year these have been promoted in key European markets through strong partnerships with our network of tour operators.

Consumer facing website launched for the Gourmet Garden Trail along with increased PR activity for this and Explorers Road.

VISIT HERTS

Gourmet Garden Trails

7 travel trade partnerships
27 businesses featured
Training delivered to **115** travel agents
10 educational trips delivered
300,000+ reach across our in market campaign activity

Explorers Road

7 journalists hosted achieving **11.3m** reach of press coverage
17 Businesses involved
20 travel agencies product trained
10 tour operator partnerships

Hertfordshire 2020 Year of Culture

LOOKING FORWARD

*Hertfordshire Year of
Culture 2020 continues!*

*Now is the time to celebrate,
share, create and explore.*

*Visit www.visithertsbusiness.co.uk
for resources and insights for
tourism and hospitality businesses*

The more you get involved in the opportunities we provide for you, the more benefit you will receive.

Download the 2020-21 Investor Benefits and Opportunities pack from our B2B website to help plan your activity with us for the coming year.

Speak to your account manager about how to make the most of your partnership with Visit Herts.

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