



VISIT HERTS



@366daysofphotography

ANNUAL REVIEW

2020

A MESSAGE FROM MARTHA LYTTON-COBOLD & GEOFF SPOONER CO-CHAIRS VISIT HERTS

It gives us great pleasure to welcome you to the Visit Herts Annual Review for 2020.

We suspect that we are all looking forward to brighter times in 2021. 2020 started with such promise for Hertfordshire; a calendar packed full of exciting events and anniversaries to be remembered, a flourishing visitor economy, and exciting campaigns to run. How quickly things changed. Survival became our key focus, rather than growth.

Visit Herts truly stepped up to the plate as a sector-leading organisation, our team's response to the unfolding crisis has been nothing less than resilient and powerful. Our shift to ever more digital has been accelerated, the way we communicate, how we work, where we work, and even when we work has had to quickly evolve to meet the ongoing challenges we have been presented and which our partners raised. Our role in sector leadership, strategy development, business support, and government lobbying – be that at a national, regional, or local level – has been critical, and we hope to have done as much as possible to support you our partners.

We had to evolve, and this has cost the organisation in a number of different ways. Like many of you, we have had to reduce our scale and say goodbye to some valued colleagues, we have had to utilise the furlough scheme, and endure the challenges of home working, the loss of companionship and of personal contact so central to our world. We've had to abandon cherished initiatives, adapting, and developing carefully pitched campaigns in increasingly reduced timeframes. At the heart of everything we do, and everything that our partners do, is people with a strong commitment to the highest standards of delivery. But we adapted and maintained relevance and our voice was strong throughout.

Looking forward, with the vaccine roll-out underway and the Government's roadmap to recovery set out over the upcoming months, the Visit Herts team are continuing full steam ahead. Our commitment remains consistent to support and assist the rebooting and rebuilding of our county's visitor economy in 2021 and beyond.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you, our partners, for your unwavering support over this past year. We are extremely fortunate to have a strong and supportive Visit Herts CEO and team in conjunction with a wonderful network of allies who recognise that whether it's facing challenges or maximising on opportunities – collaboration really is the key to success. Your ongoing support as an investor in the year ahead will be critical in helping us to leverage external funding, and to deliver an exciting and ambitious programme of activity to rebuild consumer confidence, reignite the economy, and to drive footfall throughout our county. The road to recovery won't be easy, but we will get there far quicker doing so together.

We look forward to 2021 and welcoming visitors back to your businesses and to our beautiful county. On behalf of the Partnership Group, and all at Visit Herts, we would both like to assure you of our continued support.



**MARTHA LYTTON-COBOLD
& GEOFF SPOONER
CO-CHAIRS**

A MESSAGE FROM DEIRDRE WELLS OBE CHIEF EXECUTIVE VISIT HERTS

After months of uncertainty, and the most challenging year that our industry has faced, the Government's announcement of the Roadmap out of Lockdown has finally given our sector the clarity we needed to plan our recovery. Whilst we may not be able to open quite as early as we would have wanted, nor got everything on our budget wish list, the way is clear for us to welcome back our visitors and to capitalise on the pent-up demand for Hertfordshire's wonderful and expansive tourism offer.

Over the coming months, our focus will be to support you in rebuilding consumer confidence and driving footfall. As one of the county's biggest employers and the life and soul of our high streets, we know how vital it is for both communities and tourists alike to get Hertfordshire's visitor economy back up and running as soon as possible.

This summer, our annual Hertfordshire 'Big Weekend' will be back, and this year it's going to be more important than ever before for families across the county to rediscover their favourite attractions. As part of Visit England's 'Escape the Everyday' strategy, we will deliver a national campaign focussed on the amazing food, drink, and landscape of our stunning destination. As we move towards the autumn and winter months, we will be focussing on re-establishing Hertfordshire as an incredible, year-round staycation destination, with campaign activity that centres on high value visits, and sustainable travel.

Throughout all of this exciting activity, we will continue to support our businesses, helping them to access support, to develop new products and take them to market. The pandemic has highlighted the hugely important role which Destination Management Organisations play in not only marketing their destinations but ensuring sustainable recovery and growth through high quality business support, market intelligence, product development and partnership.

This has been an extraordinarily challenging year for our sector. But the resilience, innovation and determination of our partners has been truly inspirational. My thanks to each and every one of you for all you have done to sustain our vital industry. My thanks too to my wonderful team who have worked tirelessly on your behalf, and to our Partnership Group whose wise counsel was never more essential than during this most challenging of years.

The pandemic has reminded us all of what's important – friends, family, community. Our industry is the heart and soul of our communities and we have been sorely missed. We look forward to working with you as we begin the slow road to recovery. No industry has been more affected by this terrible pandemic, but thanks to the incredible partnerships across the county, together we can build a vibrant, sustainable, and resilient industry for the future.



DEIRDRE WELLS OBE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE



@rachelmcn1

BUILDING VALUE THROUGH OUR NETWORKS

Visit Herts brings together businesses to create collaborative opportunities for our partners as well as provide a strong sector voice. We support businesses to develop new products, promote and distribute them under a strong destination brand. This level of collaboration will be critical in delivering a strong recovery for the sector. Everything we do is led 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.

"2020 was a challenging year, but with the help and support of Sue and the wider team at Visit Herts we were able to navigate the government guidelines positively and welcome visitors safely"

Henry Moore Studio and Gardens

"The Visit Herts team have been an incredible support throughout our time with them. They are always available to chat through new and exciting marketing campaign ideas and provide us valuable content spaces so we can reach all of our fabulous audience."

Paradise Wildlife Park



LOBBYING

With a seat at the table on many national, international and local industry fora, our lobbying efforts have never been more critical. Our connections have ensured the Hertfordshire visitor economy was represented at high-level, industry groups such as the Governments Tourism Industry Emergency Response Group (TIER) and DCMS Industry Recovery Groups.

In July, we also hosted Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport at Knebworth House providing an opportunity to discuss how tourism and hospitality businesses across the county had been affected as well as how hard venues were working to welcome visitors back safely

16 national speaking opportunities for our CEO

12 Brexit-related lobbying meetings

8 meetings with the Tourism Society

4 Weekly Hertfordshire LEP Intelligence and Delivery Group Meetings

24 TIER Meetings

7 Visit Britain DMO Forum meetings



Michelle Becker

BUSINESS SUPPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Our B2B communications strategy has dramatically evolved since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring that critical information on funding and guidance for the sector has been disseminated quickly and clearly.

We added a whole new section dedicated to the Covid-19 support and recovery on the Visit Herts Business website. The team have fielded hundreds of questions from the businesses throughout the year, gaining clarity and raising concerns with government where necessary.

B2B website:

10,850+ page views since 1st April 2020

With a **1m 17s** average dwell time

Dedicated Newsletters:

More than 60 newsletters

Reaching **974 contacts**

With an Open Rate of **17%** and **3%**

Click Through Rate

Over 300 businesses joined the "Good To Go" kitemark

83 Members of the Visit Herts Tourism and Hospitality LinkedIn Group



BUSINESS TRAINING AND EVENTS

We quickly adapted to virtual platforms to ensure that our industry meetings and events could continue to provide critical support at a time when businesses needed it the most. Through regular industry updates, round tables, partnership meetings, business resilience training and workshops, we've managed to deliver more events than we would in a usual year. Businesses were supported through business resilience sessions to help them adapt and respond to the crisis including a series delivered in partnership with the Hertfordshire Growth Hub

315 registered attendees across **4 industry** updates

5 business resilience workshops

5 Recovery Roundtable sessions covering food and drink, indoor attractions, accommodation, events and parks and gardens



@lucasjohnsonfaustino

TRAVEL TRADE

Throughout 2020, our travel trade strategy has dramatically evolved, and we have continued to monitor the situation to provide support for operators and trade contacts with the very latest updates and resources.

Our team has also continued to maintain our destination presence at travel trade events and shows throughout the year.

Looking ahead, the team are working on delivering a proactive rebuilding campaign, working with domestic and international buyers and distributors.

Visit Herts attended **4 face-to-face trade events** in early 2020, including the annual UKinbound workshop, Coach Tourism Association workshop, Britain and Ireland Marketplace and Excursions

20+ travel trade contacts met at the first ever virtual World Travel Market event

12 + new contacts from international student travel sector

40+ hours spent on virtual calls with operators throughout 2020



MICE

Visit Herts represents the county as a destination for MICE travel (meetings, incentive trips, conferences and events).

In 2020 we attended the virtual events MeetGB in June and The Meetings Show in October helping to build awareness of our unique venues and experiences as well as developing relationships with key stakeholders including DMCs and business events planners.

MeetGB (17 & 24 June 2020):

388 attendees across two days with
37 appointments

The Meetings Show (19-21 October 2020):

31 appointments

1 new website launched:
www.meetinherts.co.uk



RESEARCH AND INSIGHTS

Throughout a difficult year for the industry, access to timely insights and research has been a core ask from our businesses and a key requirement to support our lobbying efforts.

Regular surveys and a hub of local, national and international research reports have captured the performance and challenges that our visitor economy has faced as well as opportunities which will shape our recovery. 2020 also marked the release of our latest Cambridge Economic Impact study, based on 2019 figures, which will give us the much needed benchmark to assess the impact of the pandemic in 2021

1 Cambridge Economic Impact Study published for 2019

3 Business Barometer reports published

2 Covid-19 Impact Surveys

5 Destination Research Meetings chaired by VisitEngland to share insights and learnings

Data fed into DCMS Select Committee and APPG for Hospitality and Tourism



VISITOR ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY

2020 also marked the release of our latest Cambridge Model Economic Impact study, based on 2019 figures, which will give us the much needed benchmark to assess the impact of the pandemic in 2021.

The Cambridge Economic Impact Model is an industry respected tool for measuring the economic impact of tourism in a given area. Knowing the volume and value of tourism is an essential part of developing policies for managing tourism.

The county's visitor economy had **topped £2.4 billion** for the first time ever, welcoming **a record 29 million visitors** in 2019

£139 million was spent on average in the local economy each month in 2019, as a direct result of the county's tourism and hospitality industry

The number of tourism jobs across Herts **increased by 8% between 2017 and 2019**, accounting for **7% of total employment** in Hertfordshire last year



PROJECTS

EXPLORER'S ROAD

The Explorer's Road, is a VisitEngland project funded by Discover England and was launched in 2018. After a difficult year in 2020, this project is now being aligned to support the recovery of leisure tourism audiences to the amazing destinations up and down the East of England. A new website will ensure that The Explorer's Road is portrayed in a fresh and exciting way.

Our target market in 2021 is those domestic visitors returning to travel, when able, and looking to explore new areas of England. The touring route can include one or multiple stops along the way – the visitor can plan their journey as they wish.

£156,000 amplification funding awarded to Explorer's Road from VisitEngland

Activity delivered from September 2020 – March 2021:

New website launched with updated itinerary builder and user experience:

www.explorersroad.com

Hertfordshire's products to be showcased in focused domestic marketing campaign (taking place in 2021)



@ian.explores

PROJECTS CONNECTIONS

Connections is a Discover England Funded tourism project that continues to develop new bookable product, presented in the form of suggested itineraries, based on key themes that have appeal to visitors from North America and Canada.

These itineraries connect historical and cultural links by placing tour guides at the heart of the visitor experience.

A focussed domestic marketing campaign has been created to capture the audience's interest in key themes, destinations and products under the 'Reconnect' creative.

£158,000 amplification funding awarded to DEF Connections from VisitEngland

Activity delivered **from September 2020** - March 2021:

5 x Hertfordshire products

featured in content including Knebworth, Hatfield House, St Albans Cathedral

1 x new bookable itinerary to be created for Hertfordshire in partnership with Active England

Hertfordshire's products to be showcased in **focused domestic marketing campaign** (taking place in 2021)



PARTNERSHIPS

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

Through 2020 Visit Herts has increased collaboration with business support organisations such as Hertfordshire Growth Hub, Herts Chamber of Commerce, University of Hertfordshire, Better Business for All, Hertfordshire Community Foundation and the FSB among others to ensure we're supporting businesses as effectively as possible through the crisis.

Represented Visit Herts at **66 meetings**, including Hertfordshire's LEP/Hertfordshire's Growth Hub weekly meetings, Hertfordshire's LEP Intelligence Group, HEDOG, HACO, and Vibrant Towns

Working in partnership with Hertfordshire's Growth Hub, Visit Kent delivered **6 webinars** designed to support businesses in their recovery from the pandemic

Webinars attracted **68 registered attendees**

Hertfordshire 2020 Year of Culture

HYOC2020 was a partnership driven campaign which aimed to promote new and existing cultural activity across Hertfordshire whilst highlighting the benefits that taking part in a cultural activity can bring, both to the individual and the wider community.

Although 2020 didn't go as anyone planned, there was still plenty to celebrate as our creative partners and local community organisations found new ways to deliver services in socially distant ways.

4 blogpost inclusions throughout the year

Two dedicated HYOC features on our website

Dedicated HYOC feature was **10th most viewed webpage**, with over **3.4K views**



@desmond_mansfield

CROWDFUND HERTFORDSHIRE: SMALL INNOVATION FUND

We were delighted to be awarded the opportunity to deliver the Crowdfund Hertfordshire project, working in partnership with the Hertfordshire LEP. This fund offers small and micro businesses within the tourism, leisure, hospitality, retail, arts and cultural sectors the chance to unlock between £2000 and £5000 in match funding to help overcome the challenges of Covid-19.

Participating businesses will raise money for their project through pledges from their community and loyal customers.

29 Applications

12 projects approved

£45,000 total amount pledged

£237,127 total amount of funding delivered to businesses

233 jobs were protected

Crowdfund Paid Promotions on LinkedIn:

371 total clicks

47,407 people reached

109,291 impressions



@mattaveryuk

FUNDING

Throughout the year Visit Herts have been proactively identifying and applying for funding which allow us to deliver more support to businesses and will help fund activity that will deliver a strong recovery in 2021. The success we have achieved in securing this funding, both individually and in collaboration with other UK destinations, will mean that we can provide more benefit to investor partners in 2021 through inclusion in national confidence building and destination promotion campaigns.

Part of the Discover England Fund Domestic Adaptation Funds, 'Explorers Road' which for the project as a whole totalled **£156,000**

Part of the Discover England Fund Domestic Adaptation Funds, 'Connections' which for the project as a whole totalled **£158,000**

£100,000 grant funding for businesses in the Crowdfund Hertfordshire: Small Business Innovation Fund via Hertfordshire LEP

£5,000 for Kickstart Tourism Fund Webinars



@rachelmcn1

BUILDING VALUE THROUGH MARKETING

Delivering the destination message across our digital channels, press and campaign activity during the unique conditions of 2020 was more challenging than ever.

We have had to be more creative, more considerate of tone, more responsive, more supportive and more resilient than ever before.

Engaging and inspiring our audience, encouraging them to stay safe whilst maintaining their connection to our businesses.



@droneflyrobin

#RESPECT PROTECT ENJOY

The circumstances of 2020 required the Visit Herts marketing team to adopt a flexible approach to campaign activity throughout the year.

We launched our #RespectProtectEnjoy messaging in May, which focussed on inspiring and educating local consumers to start enjoying our natural landscapes again, in a safe and responsible way.

Over 10K impressions on social media

323 page views

Our landing page had an exceptional **dwell time of 2:13 minutes**



@andreaharry

A WEEKEND AWAY

Our autumn campaign, A Weekend Away, encouraged consumers to find their perfect weekend away in Herts, based on an interactive personality quiz that would let them know if they were 'The Tastemaker', 'The Indulger', 'The View Seeker', 'The Storyteller' or 'The Adventurer'. Their results generated a personalised itinerary for their perfect weekend in Hertfordshire.

10,802 page views

378,616 impressions generated through paid promotion

Our most popular feature for our Weekend Away campaign was The Indulger

The Weekend Away quiz received **8,610 views**



Graham Custance

COMPETITIONS

Our first competition in February offered the chance to win a bundle of prizes from our partners centred around a weekend break in Broxbourne. The competition saw exceptional entry levels and was our second most entered competition to date.

Our Christmas competition also saw high entry levels, especially considering it fell during the height of the second lockdown and Hertfordshire being placed in Tier 3. It therefore had an important role in helping to create positive associations with the county and continue engagement with our followers during a time when they were unable to visit the county or many of its businesses.

Broxbourne Competition:

8.9K page views

106.8K impressions

4.2K competition entries

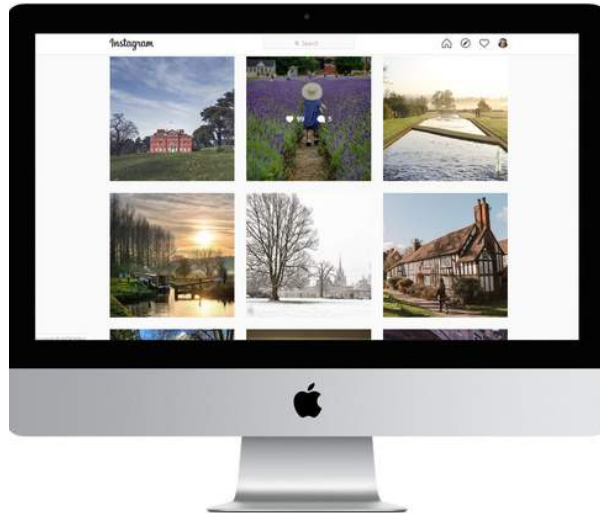
38.7% E-newsletter opt in rate

Christmas Competition:

2.5K competition entries

122.9K impressions

63% E-newsletter opt in rate



OUR WEBSITE

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, consumer messaging across the Visit Herts digital channels swiftly changed in order to ensure content was in line with government guidelines, while still promoting Hertfordshire as a desirable destination for future and local visits.

Local food and drink, takeaways, outdoor exercise locations, inspirational imagery and virtual experiences all became key themes within the blog content and were shared across the digital channels to help continue engagement with Visit Herts' followers.

300K page views

Features made up **30%** of all page views

50+ features published



SOCIAL MEDIA

Strong growth in the number of engagements vs 2019 on both Instagram and Facebook indicates just how important it was to maintain messaging across these accounts, even during the national lockdowns.

While consumers may have been unable to visit Hertfordshire in person, our inspirational posts and continued engagement with them allowed us to keep the destination front of mind and helped to present a positive image of the county for future visits.

30K Facebook engagements, up **85%** on last year

740K Instagram impressions, up **118%** on last year

3,300 Instagram followers

421K Twitter impressions with just under **3,000** followers



PRESS

This year saw us participate in more broadcast interviews than previous years, using these opportunities to strengthen our lobbying messages to government, whilst ensuring that the needs of our industry were heard by a wide range of audiences.

Whilst the restrictions in place in 2020 limited the number of journalists we were able to host in Hertfordshire throughout the year, significant emphasis was placed on responding quickly to incoming press enquiries, as well as actively pitching partners for a wide range of coverage opportunities, in order to ensure that our county remained front of mind ahead of the destination's recovery.

£159,562.54 total AVE, up from £74,965 in 2019

5,530,301 total reach, an increase from last year's 799,712 total reach

£13,296.87 average monthly AVE

460,858 average monthly reach

14 Press Releases

20+ PR Assists

10 Broadcast Interviews



LOOKING FORWARD

In an unprecedented year, Visit Herts has been focused on supporting businesses to navigate the challenges our industry has faced.

Now, with the vaccine roll-out underway and the Government's roadmap unveiled, we have our Respond, Reboot, Rebuild recovery strategy and would like to invite you to join us in an exciting and ambitious programme of activity to rebuild consumer confidence in 2021 - at no investor fee increase and no additional campaign costs.

Your support will help us leverage external funding, create engaging campaigns that drive footfall to Hertfordshire and rebuild back better, together.

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

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