



ANNUAL REVIEW

2021

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

Welcome to the Visit Herts Annual Review.

The last 12 months have been challenging times for us all once again, but fortunately the worst of the pandemic now appears to be over, and it is our hope that this year will see normal life resume fully for us all again at least regarding COVID-19.

At the time of going to press - yet more unpredictable and volatile world events are currently taking place that are impacting our way of life and our visitor economy, but one advantage of the pandemic has meant that adapting, pivoting and resilience are by now second nature for many of us and our businesses.

It is true that many aspects of our world have changed forever, from the increase in hybrid working and 'workations' to the desire for more sustainable and experiential activities and experiences and the increasing need to ensure the wellbeing of both employees and family members.

Furthermore, although international travel has for the most part resumed, many people in the UK have re-discovered (or discovered for the first time) the joys of visiting and experiencing all that our wonderful county has to offer and our research shows that this trend is set to continue even once outbound travel returns.





Fortunately, our visitor economy in Hertfordshire is very well-placed to support many of these changes, and we are particularly delighted that the Visit Herts team secured substantial Community Renewal Funding towards the end of last year to really harness the potential and opportunities provided by the extensive and growing film and production facilities in the county.

In the medium to long term, this project will really help to secure Hertfordshire's reputation as THE county for 'film tourism' and film experiences. In addition, the project will also provide valuable training and skills development for local schools and colleges and generate much needed additional revenue for businesses. We are excited to see this project unfold and develop.

Alongside our goal to really turbocharge Hertfordshire's visitor economy following the pandemic, other key priorities have been to ensure that our destination is as welcoming and inclusive as possible - that everyone, no matter what their background or access needs can enjoy our wonderful county. In addition, our growing commitment to sustainability is not only timely, but the right thing to do to meet the needs of a growing market looking to travel in a way which supports the environment and our communities.

Throughout 2021, we have been relentless in our lobbying of Government at a national, regional and local level to support our partners and to unlock urgently needed funding and policy changes relating to the pandemic.

The Visit Herts team are continuing full steam ahead with our commitment to support and assist the growth of Hertfordshire's visitor economy in 2022 and beyond.

We would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank Deirdre and the executive team and our investment partners for your unwavering support and constructive engagement over the last 12 months which has been critical in helping us to continue to deliver an exciting and ambitious programme of activity and to drive footfall throughout our county.

On behalf of the Partnership Group, and all the team at Visit Herts, we would like to wish you and your colleagues a safe and successful year ahead.

MARTHA LYTTON-COBBOLD & GEOFF SPOONER

VISIT HERTS CO-CHAIRS

A MESSAGE FROM DEIRDRE WELLS OBE CHIEF EXECUTIVE VISIT HERTS

As our industry emerges from an extremely challenging two years and the world begins to learn to live with Covid, the words that I am hearing most often are "cautiously optimistic".

There is no doubt that there is strong demand for our destination. Forward bookings for 2022 look positive - despite the return of outbound travel - and our pubs, bars, restaurants and attractions continue to provide the much-needed opportunity for families and friends to reconnect post pandemic.

But the disturbing situation in Ukraine provides a stark reminder that we continue to live in an uncertain world. The fragile recovery of our industry was already beset by concerns about staffing and supply chain costs. Concerns about security and the cost of living may be replacing concerns about Covid among our customers, but they are a reminder that we will need to work harder and smarter as an industry to attract and retain our visitors, and we will continue to need local and national Government support to ensure that our journey to recovery is not stalled.



But we have learned much over the past two years. Not least, that our desire as a society to reconnect is strong - to reconnect with friends and family, with our location, with nature and with ourselves. I am so proud of the role which our industry has played in supporting these reconnections - providing the places and landscapes which have been the solace and respite for our communities. There is no doubt that our society has been transformed by the pandemic. The world of work has changed forever, providing opportunities for our towns and villages to benefit from mid-week footfall and hosting those all important business meetings, previously the preserve of our major cities. We have the opportunity to rebuild our communities in a way that works for what we want now - sustainable landscapes, opportunities to enhance our well-being, innovative spaces which support collaboration and entrepreneurship, and places to learn, relax and reconnect.

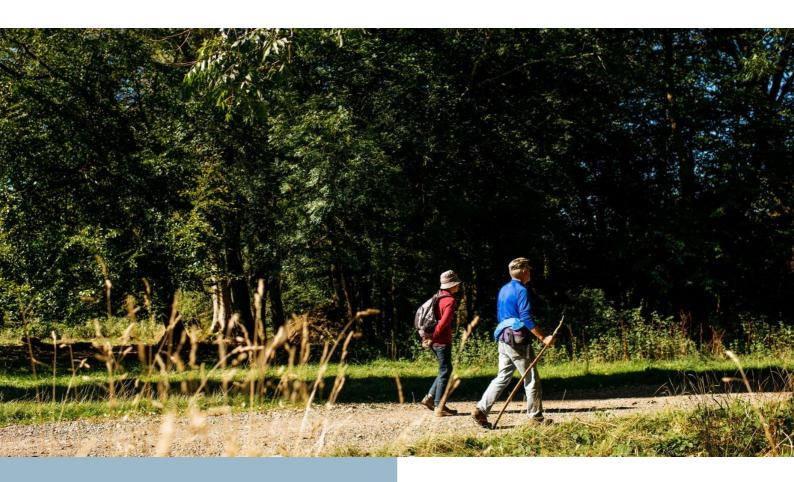
For many of us, box-sets and sourdough were the highlights of the pandemic. How fitting that the small, and big screen, will be a key part of our county's recovery from the pandemic. Our success in securing the Community Renewal Fund project, Herts, Camera, Action! will provide us with an unprecedented opportunity to promote the world-class production facilities here in the UK's very own Hollywood. Developing production skills within our schools and colleges; connecting local businesses to production teams to improve local supply chains; and building a first-class screen tourism offer are just some of the opportunities which this project will unlock.

The collaboration and partnership which the industry has shown in recent years provides a strong foundation for our recovery. We are extremely grateful to all Herts investors for their support which has enabled us to help thousands of businesses across the county.

My thanks to co-Chairs, Martha Lytton-Cobbold and Geoff Spooner and the Herts Partnership Group for their wise counsel and to my wonderful Visit Herts team for their enthusiasm and tireless support for our vital sector.

With this support, and a rich and diverse tourism offer, there is every reason indeed to be "cautiously optimistic".

DEIRDRE WELLS OBE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE



VISITOR ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY

Following the unprecedented challenges of 2020, a supplementary Cambridge Economic Impact Study was published in 2021, highlighting the impact from the COVID-19 pandemic on the county's visitor economy.

These latest findings, based on 2020 data show that Hertfordshire's visitor economy performed above the national average across several areas, but also demonstrates why our industry continues to need long-term investment and support to enable a sustainable destination recovery.

As a result of the pandemic, there was a **52% decrease** in visitors during 2020, and a **53% decline** in value compared to 2019.

£65 million was spent on average in the local economy each month in 2020, (compared to £139 million on average in 2019).

The number of tourism jobs across the Hertfordshire also showed a **decrease of 30%** between 2019 and 2020, to **30,389**, accounting for 5% of total employment in Hertfordshire last year.



INDUSTRY RECOVERY

As the UK continued to emerge from the worst of the pandemic and consumers looked to reconnect with family and friends, Visit Herts successfully secured funding from the Stay Safe, Stay Open fund, offering small businesses in Hertfordshire access to a range of free support to help transition to living with Covid

Working with the Hertfordshire Growth Hub and the Better Business For All partnership, Visit Herts continues to deliver a package of support around managing compliance in Covid19 as a risk, businesses recovery and increasing consumer confidence in shopping/spending locally in Hertfordshire.

STAY SAFE, STAY OPEN

Engagement with:

42 Parish/District/Town councils

35 attractions

21 accommodation providers

26 Pubs/bars/restaurants

34 businesses received 1:1 support and advice

Toolkit shared with businesses including sector-specific messaging, promotional assets, template copy, downloadable PDF and presentation slides

8m+ impressions through digital campaign activity, with paid search activity seeing **above industry standard** click-through rate

Shortlisted for the Regulatory Excellence Awards 2021



LOBBYING

With a seat at the table on many national, international and local industry forums, our lobbying efforts continue to be critical.

Our CEO Deirdre Wells OBE has represented the Hertfordshire tourism and hospitality industry at high-level, industry-leading groups such as the Government's Tourism Industry Emergency Response Group (TIER) and Tourism Alliance meetings.

Deirdre's media appearances across TV, radio and print provided a valuable platform for raising awareness of the impact of the long-term effects from the pandemic on, and the support needed for our industry to continue to rebuild.

- **14** national speaking opportunities for our CEO
- 22 meetings related to lobbying
- 8 Tourism Society meetings
- 7 Tourism Alliance meetings
- **26** Weekly Hertfordshire LEP Intelligence and Delivery Group Meetings
- **6** TIER Meetings
- 11 Visit Britain DMO Forum meetings



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 and have continued to update partners through a variety of channels.

B2B website:

- Over **9,300** page views
- Over 1,500 page views of Crowdfund Small Business Innovation fund content

Dedicated Newsletters:

- 72 newsletters
- **575** business recipients
- 20% open rate average
- 5% click rate average

Brand-new **Visit Herts Business Twitter** account launched in
November

Visit Herts LinkedIn:

- 72 new followers
- 10% engagement rate



BUSINESS TRAINING AND EVENTS

As restrictions continued in 2021, we delivered virtual webinars and industry meetings and events to continue to provide critical support at a time when businesses needed it the most.

We were delighted to finally start to host inperson events, and it was great to reunite and meet with so many partners in many of our county's finest venues. **171** attendees attended 2 virtual and 2 in-person networking events

1 AirBnb Experiences virtual webinar with 36 attendees

1 Hotelier's Forum with 16 businesses attending

1 ERDF Kick Start webinar with 9 attendees

2 business toolkits created for campaign support and filming guidance



TRAVEL TRADE

Throughout 2021, our team has continued to maintain contact and provide support for leisure operators and trade partners.

Looking ahead, the team are excited to be engaging with a number of major inbound operators on dedicated distribution activity, and to maximise our Herts, Camera, Action activity with domestic and international trade buyers and distributors.

Over 110 1:1 engagements with travel trade contacts including coach operators, UK group organisers and international DMCs

Visit Herts attended **5** trade events, with **2** virtual and **3** in-person, including a return to face-to-face meetings at World Travel Market

1 distributor webinar for partners with AirBnb

4 dedicated travel trade newsletters sent to over 120 trade contacts, with an average open rate of 33%



RESEARCH AND INSIGHTS

As our industry emerges from the pandemic and begins to rebuild, access to timely insights and research is vital to support our businesses and a key requirement for our lobbying efforts.

Regular surveys and studies have captured the performance and challenges that our visitor economy has faced as well as opportunities which will shape our recovery. **2020 data** examined in Cambridge Economic Impact Model study for benchmarking

3 Social Listening reports were produced, looking at online conversations in Hertfordshire about tourism, visitor behaviour and perceptions of Herts

1 Screen Tourism Audit looking at existing film and TV product in the county, along with opportunities for development



MICE

Visit Herts represents the county as a destination for MICE travel (meetings, incentive trips, conferences and events), building awareness of our unique experiences and developing relationships with key stakeholders including DMCs and business events planners from both corporate and association markets.

MeetEngland (February 2021): 19 appointments with business events planner from the UK, Europe, USA and China.



PARTNERSHIPS

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.

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.

60+ meetings with partners

25 renewed partners

4 new partners

Represented Visit Herts at **24 meetings**, including Hertfordshire's
LEP/Hertfordshire's Growth Hub
weekly meetings, Hertfordshire's
LEP Intelligence Group,
Hertfordshire's Economic
Development Officer Group
(HEDOG), HACO, and Vibrant Towns



CROWDFUND HERTFORDSHIRE: SMALL BUSINESS 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 needed to leverage funding via the Crowdfunder platform to match-fund an innovative adaptation / solution to continue operating.

Following an influx of applicants in 2020, funding to extend the platform for a further four months was agreed, supporting businesses from a secondary lockdown.

VISIT HERTS

PROJECT SUMMARY

46 applications

20 projects approved

£64,000 total amount pledged

£368,161 total amount of funding delivered to businesses

290 jobs were protected

73% saw an increase in footfall or online traffic as a result of new adaptation

45% stated they now have improved financial resilience

27% stated they have hired additional employees.



BUILDING VALUE THROUGH MARKETING

Throughout 2021, we balanced the delivery of the destination message to drive recovery with fluctuating restrictions and guidance.

Specific recovery and project funding, in partnership with our own organic channels provided us with a broad platform from which to share our creative and targeted content.

As always, we sought to inspire our audience, encouraging them to travel and visit safely whilst maintaining their connection to our businesses.



PAID ACTIVITY

In 2021 the Visit Herts team hosted paid social activity across Instagram and Facebook at key points throughout the year.

This allowed us to grow the Visit Herts audiences, reach new people, drive traffic to the Visit Herts website, and be far more targeted with our messaging, helping us to put the right content in front of the right people.

This activity was used to help boost competitions and help drive consumer confidence in Hertfordshire as a safe destination to visit. This was achieved by boosting content such as the Summer in Herts features, which targeted key audiences with information about family breaks, outdoor activities and days out that could once again be enjoyed in the county,

SUMMER IN HERTS:

Dedicated landing page with **8** brand-new features

Over 11,500 social link clicks

Over **378,000** reach

Over **822k** impressions

Over **5,300** website page views



THREE RIVERS

In autumn, Three Rivers partnered with Visit Herts to deliver a dedicated programme of business engagement and campaign activity across Visit Herts' channels.

Targeting engaged audiences, the activity aimed to increase awareness of the destination and inspire future day trips and short breaks.

This activity generated excellent results, with the competition alone generating one of the highest levels of engagements in a Visit Herts competition. 59 businesses featured

50,000 page views across dedicated campaign landing page with **4** features

1.3m impressions through paid social media activity

1 influencer content partnership featuring 7 venues and achieving15.7k Instagram reach and over 2,800 video views

33% open rate and **7%** click-rate on newsletters

4,700 competition entries, with a 50% opt-in rate

Suite of **new photography** to be used for future marketing



COMPETITIONS

Competitions continue to be a great way to work with and support our partners, in addition to being an excellent source of optin data. For 2022, competitions will form a key part of all campaign activity, focusing on high-quality accommodation prizes to drive overnight stays.

Our 2021 Christmas competition was Visit Herts' best performing competition over, with just over 7,000 entries

Three Rivers competition:

13K page views

4.7K competition entries

50% e-newsletter opt in rate

Christmas competition:

7K competition entries

45.2K impressions

44% e-newsletter opt in rate



WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

2021 saw strong growth for our consumer social media channels, with exceptional follower growth on Instagram in particular. This was primarily driven by a number of targeted campaigns, with paid social activity helping to drive growth across our channels at a time when consumers were actively seeking out days out and holiday inspiration once more.

The website also saw some excellent growth, indicated by website visits almost doubling vs 2020, again driven by a range of campaign activity and a gradual lifting of restrictions which once again encouraged consumers to actively search for ways to explore Hertfordshire.

160,000 website users52 inspirational features created1,400 organic social media posts

Instagram:

4,000 followers 1,240,00 impressions 22,000 engagements



Twitter:

3,000 followers 318,000 impressions 10,200 engagements



Facebook:

2,300 followers 2,400,000 impressions 69,000 engagements





PRESS

Reactive and proactive PR activity remains a key strength at Visit Herts. Nurturing both new and existing media relations throughout 2021 remained of particular importance.

The Visit Herts PR team also optimized the opportunity afforded to them to start rehosting press and influencer contacts once more, as the industry re-opened and restrictions allowed them to do so.

£286,000 total AVE, up from £159,562 in 2020

10,400,000 total reach, an increase from last year's 5,000,000 total reach

£23,853 average monthly AVE

15 Press Releases

22 PR Assists

3 press / influencer trips hosted



PROJECTS CONNECTIONS

Connections is a Discover England Funded tourism project consisting of 10 England destinations including Visit Herts who have been working together to develop product for the US market, focussed on bringing the cultural and historical connections between our nations to life.

In response to the pandemic, new funding allowed for the adaption of the existing Connections themes and products to fit within the domestic landscape and strengthen the authentic experiences. The project focused on "Re-Connecting" family, history, and heritage and emphasised connectivity between destinations.

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

Activity delivered from September 2020 - March 2021 included:

Major domestic campaign

launched "Take Time to Reconnect" with local history, places and stories. Hertfordshire creative featured across social media, local radio and press / media

10 travel trade events attended with Hertfordshire represented at each





PROJECTS GOURMET GARDEN TRAILS

Funded by VisitEngland's Escape the Everday and SELEP's Sector Support Fund to kickstart post-Covid recovery, Gourmet Garden Trails ran campaigns throughout the year including coverage of new partners and destinations including the RHS and East and West Sussex, inspiring domestic visitors to experience each partner regions' outstanding gardens and superb local restaurants, cafés, vineyards and breweries.

1 new partnership with Royal Horticultural Society (RHS)

2 digital campaigns throughout 2021 with Knebworth House as flagship products

18.9m impressions from digital campaign activity

Brand-new photography bank for ongoing promotion





PROJECTS

HERTS, CAMERA, ACTION

Led by Visit Herts, along with project partners at the Hertfordshire Growth Hub and the University of Hertfordshire, this new programme is one of five successful bids to have been put forward for the UK Community Renewal Fund by Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

Delivered throughout 2022, this project aims to capitalise on the world-leading hub of film and TV studios located in South Hertfordshire to ensure that the wider community benefits from these assets.

Activity will include:

- Creative industries grants funding programme offering grants of up to £5,000
- Package of specialist and technical support for creative businesses
- **CPD programme** to upskill the creative industry workforce
- Development of cast and crew accommodation packages
- 10 brand-new screen tourism products through a dedicated Screen Tourism Development programme



FUNDING

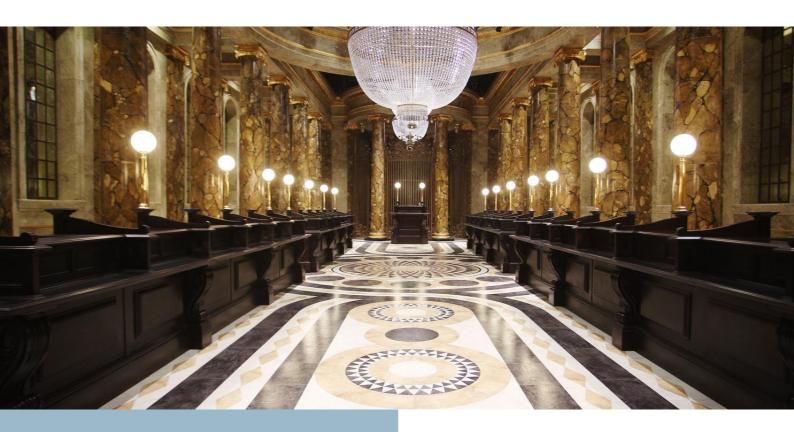
Throughout the year Visit Herts have been proactively identifying and applying for funding which allows us to deliver more support to businesses and will help fund activity that will continue to deliver a strong recovery in 2021 and beyond.

The success we have achieved in securing this funding, both individually and in collaboration with other UK destinations, will mean that we can provide even more benefit to investor partners in 2022 through inclusion in large-scale confidence building and destination and place-marketing campaigns.

£287,793 from Hertfordshire County Council supporting Hertfordshire businesses to increase business compliance post-Covid, driving recovery and increasing consumer confidence

£828,230 from the UK Community Renewal Fund, capitalising on the world-leading hub of film and TV studios in South Hertfordshire to ensure wider community benefits from these assets.

£24,820 from the Three Rivers ARG funding, to deliver bespoke business engagement and a dedicated destination campaign.



LOOKING FORWARD

Our new strategy sets out a three-year plan which focuses on close alignment with local and national strategies by placing the visitor economy firmly at the heart of our destinations to enable the wider recovery.

As we launch Herts Camera Action funded activity and start to position Hertfordshire as a world-class screen tourism destination, we have a huge opportunity in 2022 to raise awareness of our incredible county, attracting new markets and encouraging our returning visitors to explore further. We're excited to deliver a year-long programme of activity that will maximise exposure for our investor partners across the county, not only spreading the benefits wider but also providing our visitors with a wider offering.

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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Sara Boethe

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