

VIC/TIC funding

Wells Maltings Trust has asked WTC for financial support for running the Visitor Information Centre and this has been granted on an “as and if required” basis with a ceiling of £10k for the financial year 2025/2026

This will be called on a three monthly basis, in arrears, taking into account any attributable costs and receipts. The first quarter has not yielded any income for the TIC nor have any additional expenses been incurred.

I propose that an interim payment of £2,500 is paid to Wells Maltings Trust which represents one quarter of the annual budget of £10,000.

VIC/TIC working party report

Our (WTC) working party has been working with staff and volunteers from Wells Maltings to identify funding sources to support the VIC. Our journey started by looking into the way that other TIC/VICs in our region are funded and we asked MP Steff Aquarone's office to seek guidance from Visit England.

We have found that the previous model with a “cascade” of TICs/VICs from National to Regional to local level, in our case Visit Britain; Visit England; Visit East of England; Visit North Norfolk; Wells TIC/VIC, has been abandoned and the funding streams have been almost entirely discontinued.

There is a trend away from the traditional flyer and personal information service towards digital solutions broadly adhering to the same cascade structure with websites owned and operated by respective Destination Management Organisations, DMOs. Our nearest regional DMO is Visit North Norfolk, VNN, which is funded by its membership fees with publicly funded support from NNDC. It does represent Wells as a destination with no cost to WTC although it will require oversight from Wells and is very limited. Our view is that VNN does not sufficiently promote Wells as a destination and that we need something more. However, it is available for local businesses and venues to join as paying members, in return for payment there are varying levels of promotion.

In addition to the national and regional DMOs, most towns in this area have local tourism groups that look very specifically at their own area as a destination, developing local strategy and ways to enhance tourism in their towns. These are referred to as Local Tourism Action Groups, LTAGs

Examples of these organisations include Visit Felixstowe, Visit Beccles, This is Cromer, Visit Sheringham AND Experience Sheringham, Visit Holt, Choose Woodbridge, Visit Waveney Valley among others.

It is important to differentiate between commercial websites looking for revenue, from membership and advertising, and official tourism organisations. Several private businesses have developed tourism websites for commercial gain, e.g. in Wells with the Wells Guide (wellsguide.com). This is an example of a very informative guide to Wells which is prepared commercially at no cost to WTC. The content is generated by its publishers, and it generates revenue through its advertising. Importantly,

neither WTC nor any DMO that may be formed in Wells can control the content of a commercially published guide.

So, who or what is or should be promoting Wells and its surrounding venues as a destination?

Looking at Norfolk and Suffolk, the vast majority of TICs/VICs are products of DMOs and the DMOs, from the top tier down to LTAGs, are funded by a mix of business funding, either through a BID or a membership scheme, local authority funding and revenue streams generated by the DMO's activities.

Wells does not have a DMO (or LTAG) but it would be an advantage for plans going forward if it had one. It could be a "partnership" between the business community, the various event/venue groups like carnival committee and the Maltings and the town council.

Wells does not have a chamber of commerce or other business membership group, but many businesses do communicate with each other and do cooperate for events like carnival and Christmas Tide. It would be helpful if a business membership group could be formed, perhaps around the current initiative to attract funding for economic prosperity and promotion of our town. It would then be just one more small step to form a DMO partnership to bring in collaborative working with the other groups and the town council.

The Visitor Information Centre could then be a "child" of the DMO and the town guide leaflet could be a DMO product, both benefiting from input from the wider group and local volunteers.

This is a continuing work in progress.

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Peter Rainsford

WTC TIC working party