

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Executive Director Adults & Communities

To

Cabinet

On

3rd November 2020

Report prepared by: Scott Dolling – Director of Culture & Tourism

Agenda
Item No.

10

Southend Pier Improvements

Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s): Place
Cabinet Member: Councillor K Robinson
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report outlines some significant improvements to the Pier visitor offer to be in place for the 2021 season.

2. Recommendations

That Cabinet;

- 2.1 **Agree the proposed improvements to the Pier Head visitor offer and that approval is sought from Council for the required capital funding;**
- 2.2 **Note the medium and longer term plans for the pier.**

3. Background

- 3.1 Southend Pier is an international icon and a brand that resonates with area's tourism credentials. At 1.3 miles it is the longest pleasure pier in the world.
- 3.2 Visitor numbers to the Pier have generally been steadily increasing since the last major fire, although enforced closure this year due to coronavirus lockdown lost the spring and early summer volumes.
- 3.3 Investment into the Pier in recent years has been significant, with much of the focus on ensuring the structural integrity as well as some improvements to enhance the visitor offer, but more is needed in this area.
- 3.4 In 2011 the new Royal Pavilion was added at the Pier Head which represented a significant enhancement to the visitor offer. Despite an initial entertainment and performance programme, years of austerity budget reductions cut the activity in this space. There are several sell-out events and activities such as

- Ghost Train and Santa on the Pier, but more is needed to maximise usage and drive footfall on a more regular basis.
- 3.5 The Pier entrance was significantly improved in 2019 with a £200,000 investment resulting in a far better experience for visitors. In the current financial year all four stem shelters have been refurbished and will have LED lighting by spring 2021. A new toilet block at the pier head will also be completed by spring 2021.
- 3.6 Southend Council is investing £3.25M in the production of new trains which come into service in the spring of 2021. The designs and colour scheme were informed by public engagement with thousands responding and an overwhelming preference to see the livery return to green and cream.
- 3.7 Designs had been considered by members for a new building on the pavilion deck (shore end) with an estimated cost of £10.5M. Following engagement with visitors during the summer, feedback has shown that the focus needs to be on enhancing the Pier Head offer. The immediate progress on the visitor experience will therefore focus on the Pier Head. We are committed to developing the shore end attraction and meet our aspirations of Southend Pier providing a world class visitor offer.
- 3.8 For the 2021 season, alterations to the Royal Pavilion will provide for an increased visitor offer creating a fixed bar connected to an expanded kitchen area to improve events and function viability. A programme of events and performances based on feedback during the survey will be developed in the Royal Pavilion in 2021. The changing programme will include attractive activity aimed at driving footfall for visitors and residents to return more often.
- 3.9 A new Pier Head venue adjacent to the railway station, windbreaks and terraced section will be added during the 2021 season with further visitor attractions to be added in future phases. An outline design is appended. There are indicative designs also for the future phases aimed at increasing visitor experience but the final offer will be decided following further visitor engagement. The existing beach huts providing pop-up offers and opportunities will be returned to the shore end platform.
- 3.10 A tearoom in the space used by Jamie and Jimmy for filming has been piloted successfully during 2020 and will be developed fully for 2021.
- 3.11 Following a lengthy closure and restricted operations during the spring due to the pandemic disruption, August visitor numbers reached 53,000. September's figures were almost a thousand higher than 2019 despite coronavirus restrictions. This demonstrates that visitor demand at the Pier is positive and accords with staycation trends. With an improved offer planned for 2021, visitors will be able to enjoy more experiences and subsequent increased dwell time at the Pier.
- 3.12 Other improvements already introduced or imminently ready supporting an improved visitor experience include: A new website specifically for Southend Pier supplementing the existing social media platforms, increased 'Southend Longest Pier' souvenirs range, advance online purchase and joint ticket options, ongoing customer service training and opening times to allow

increased dwell time before first train departs. The increasing use of technology and digital means to provide visitor information will be developed – initially through the VE Day project planned for 2021.

- 3.13 Improved marketing and awareness activity will also be undertaken including the following: Highlighting last opportunity to use the current trains, Highlighting and developing offers for residents, approaching more special interest groups, increasing visiting ships, taking a lead role in national Piers Society activity and joint promotional campaigns which support the staycation agenda for the wider tourism offer. Research will continue to engage with users and potential users and inform behavioural change initiatives.

4. Medium / longer term objectives

- 4.1 Officers will develop recommendations for Cabinet to consider improving the offer further with the following:
- 4.2 Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality visitor offer in partnership with wider cultural and creative sector partners.
- 4.3 Assess future building projects at the shore and Pier Head for financial viability and work with the Pier Museum Trust to develop an improved and joined up experience.
- 4.4 Railway track sections continue to be moved to gridline 4/5 allowing expansion of offer at stem with wider walkway. An additional train stop at the shore end will be developed to coincide with an enhanced offer at this location.
- 4.5 Increased wind protection and cover of the pier head and stem.
- 4.6 Major structural works continue at outer pier head and Prince George extension.
- 4.7 Review management arrangements and introduce an advisory or shadow board adding external expertise.
- 4.8 Seek external funding and partnership opportunities.

5. Other Options

- 5.1 Investment is needed to increase the Pier's visitor appeal. The timing could be extended but this is not recommended as these proposals are already a phased approach.

6. Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 A programmed and proactive approach to maintenance and management of the structure will reduce the possibility of unplanned closures and higher costs. Co-designing the visitor offer with users will increase participation and income opportunities.

7. Corporate Implications

- 7.1 Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map.
- 7.2 Pride and Joy 1,2 and 3. Active and Involved 3, Opportunity and Prosperity 2

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 An events programme will be added to the Pier's annual revenue budget for 2021/22 onwards through the budget cycle however this will be self-financing so that all costs will be covered with additional income. The content will be informed by co-design and user input.
- 8.2 Alterations to the Royal Pavilion will cost £336,000 and which is a self-financing capital investment scheme with the additional income meeting the financing costs and additional expenditure. The new Pier Head development phase 1 has been costed at approximately £1.2M and this will need to be included in the capital investment programme and will be funded by borrowing.
- 8.3 Structural Capital commitments required over the coming years include continued commitment for funding of Prince George Extension and Timber Outer Pier Head works along with a phased approach to reinstatement of gridlines 4 and 5 over the medium term. This latter scheme is proposed to be included in an ongoing programme of improvements for the pier and included in the capital investment programme at the appropriate time.
- 8.4 Providing additional services and / or securing tenants for venues will provide additional income for the pier. Longer dwell times with more activities will raise the average spend of visitors.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1 There are no Legal implications.

10. People Implications

- 10.1 There are no People implications.

11. Property Implications

- 11.1 The Pier is the Council's asset and will be enhanced through the ongoing

investment. The Pier is a listed building and requires appropriate consent for works.

12. Consultation

- 12.1 Feedback during summer 2020 from pier visitors outlined the following priorities:
- 12.2 Improvements to the overall visitor offer with particular emphasis on the Pier Head were referenced strongly.
- 12.3 A programme of entertainment in the Royal Pavilion should be introduced including live music, comedy, arts and performance.
- 12.4 More things to do should be in place including vintage penny amusements and more visiting ships/boat trips.
- 12.5 A fully functioning restaurant and pub serving freshly cooked fish and chips, craft beers/cocktails or similar.
- 12.6 Recognition that seaside culture is integral to our overall offer and the Pier is what makes Southend truly unique.

13. Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 13.1 An access and inclusivity review has taken place across the council's tourism and culture offer with results from the extensive engagement being fed into ongoing developments. The Pier offer will include a programme of events and activities which will include targeted activity to increase inclusive and accessibility topics raised. New building projects connected to this overview will have separate accessibility features as they are agreed and implemented.

14. Risk Assessment

15. Value for Money

- 15.1 The Pier is a significant tourism asset for the wider economy and citizens' Pride and Joy. This phased approach builds on continuing improvement and developing the offer over a period of time.

16. Community Safety Implications

17. Environmental Impact

Feasibility work on impacts to the Pier of future climate change expectations to be undertaken which will help inform future development.

18. Background Papers

19. Appendices

Designs and phases