

## Visit Felixstowe:

### Towards a sustainable future for visitor services in Felixstowe

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#### BACKGROUND

In July 2015 Felixstowe Forward (FF) held an engagement event – Taking the Town Forward – with the aim to work with businesses and organisations to tackle challenges in the town and bring in improvements. In October it produced a town improvement plan which included a key objective to ‘Promote Felixstowe as a high quality destination town for residents and visitors developing the tourism offer by working with hotel and tourist attraction providers’. In response to this objective, FF established a tourism sub group which has been working with partners to make ‘Visit Felixstowe – Great days by the Sea’ the prominent visitor brand.

The town improvement plan also identified an objective to support and develop a culture of enterprise and entrepreneurship within Felixstowe, alongside coordinated and targeted marketing of the facilities, events and opportunities within the town. This included exploring, with the events organisers, the setting up of a CIC or similar ‘entity’.

The tourism sub group has concluded that to enable a long term sustainable future for visitor services Visit Felixstowe should be constituted as an entity in its own right.

**This short paper outlines the proposed mission and aims of Visit Felixstowe and potential structure and governance.**

**It seeks to make the following recommendations to Felixstowe Town Council**

- 1) Approve the setting up of Visit Felixstowe Community Interest Company to achieve long term sustainability of visitor services in the town.**
- 2) To elect a representative from the Town Council to serve on the Visit Felixstowe CIC board as a non-executive director.**
- 3) To support the Board of Directors to realise the aspirations of Visit Felixstowe**

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#### **‘Visit Felixstowe’ Mission and Aims**

Mission: To make Felixstowe a great place to work, live and visit

Aims:

- To collaborate and support groups and individuals with a key interest in economic benefit to the Town; Felixstowe’s festivals and event organisers, businesses and partners from the public and private sector.
- Ensure activity, marketing, promotions and communications are current and relevant on the [www.visitfelixstowe.co.uk](http://www.visitfelixstowe.co.uk) portal.
- Deliver and manage a vibrant events programme in the town.
- Deliver and manage marketing and promotional activity and initiatives to bring benefit to members.

Operationally this would mean that Visit Felixstowe might want to in the short term:

- Support event organisers e.g. insurance cost savings, coordinated publicity and promotion
- Provide storage
- Build an event volunteer database
- Apply for funding to support event organisers

In the longer term operationally 'Visit Felixstowe' might want to aspire to:

- Manage event spaces on the behalf of landowners
- Manage event applications for Felixstowe event areas
- Manage noticeboards and ensure they are kept updated
- Promote and encourage new events
- Coordinate publicity and promotional campaigns
- Manage the 'Visit Felixstowe' website and communications
- Provide appropriate governance to support new events

This work is currently undertaken by a small team through Felixstowe Forward. As a place based initiative FF needs to enable a fully sustainable model responsible for continuing this work and taking it forward beyond the expected life term of FF (ie April 2018).

The strategic vision of FF is to enable the town of Felixstowe to find a sustainable model for event organisers, visitor services and to maximise the economic benefit of a vibrant events programme for all stakeholders.

### **Governance**

Felixstowe Forward, under the working title Visit Felixstowe, has been considering various options on a suitable governance model. Having taken advice and explored various options it has concluded that the preferred option would be to set up a CIC – A Community Interest Company limited by guarantee and not for profit. (Information on what a CIC does is included in Appendix 1.)

A CIC has the following attributes:

- Directors can make decisions
- Registration is simple (register as a company limited by guarantee followed by an application to apply for CIC status)
- Regulation is light touch (accountable to Companies House)
- Limited by guarantee (protects directors liability)
- Legal purpose MUST BE for the benefit of the community
- It can access funding
- Assets are locked and cannot be distributed to shareholders/members
- Not for profit status is visible and assured
- Can trade and employ people

There are plenty of CIC examples that exist and a number are included in the endnotes for references.

The recommended governance is:

**Visit Felixstowe  
Board of Directors**



**Visit Felixstowe  
Members**

Pooled from organisations that have an interest in Visit Felixstowe eg:

**Event organisers  
Tourist attractions  
Public and Private Sector**

(Members act like shareholders: The Board would be expected to consult with members. Members can hold the Board to account and vote on important decisions)

Expressions of interest for two of the directorships have already been received from:

Nick Barber and Stephen Wyatt

The FF tourism sub group has identified a vacancy on the Board for a third director.

#### **The role of Felixstowe Forward, Suffolk Coastal District Council and Felixstowe Town Council?**

Felixstowe Forward has a keen interest in seeing the CIC develop and support the long term sustainability of visitor services within the town. It is proposed that both FF (on behalf of SCDC) and FTC be formally asked to consider nominating a representative from the organisation to the Visit Felixstowe board as a non-executive director. (A non-executive director stands back from the day-to-day running of the business, working alongside the executive team as required to facilitate the strategic decision-making process).

#### **Members**

Members act like shareholders. Initial members would be drawn from the organisations that contribute the greatest benefit to the town's visitor economy and who have the most to gain from a coordinated approach and shared experience and knowledge.

Major event organisers in the Town have been identified as:

- Art on the Prom
- Felixstowe Carnival
- Felixstowe Book Festival
- The Lions
- The Rotary

In the longer term the membership might expand to include tourist attractions and other interested partners.

**Is everything set in stone?**

The simple answer is no. If in the future the decision is made that another constitution better suits the aims and objectives, the constitution can be amended. If in the future the Board of Directors wish to expand its Board it can do so, and may consider it appropriate, as it becomes an entity in its own right.

**Next Steps and timetable**

June 8	Felixstowe Town Council response
June 13	Felixstowe Forward Sponsor group response
June 30	Tourism sub group to appoint third director and initial members
July 2016	Set up Visit Felixstowe CIC as a company, and register as a CIC.
Sept 2016	Visit Felixstowe Board meet with members to: Clarify purpose, governance and process for establishing an aspirational plan
Sept 2016-March 2018	Felixstowe Forward to continue to provide operational support to the 'Visit Felixstowe' brand and identity to build capacity

## Appendix 1

### What is a CIC?

<http://www.cicassociation.org.uk/about/what-is-a-cic>

Community Interest Companies (known as C.I.C.'s) are one of the fastest growing community oriented enterprise movements in the country. Roughly 1 in every 200 new companies last year was a CIC, and as of Jan 2016 there are more than 11,000 CICs on the Regulators register.

CICs can vary from small 'kitchen table' type organisations, to multimillion pound turnover organisations employing thousands of people. They can be set up as both Company Limited by Guarantee and Company Limited by Shares, and are often described as Mutuals or Social Enterprise.

Co-operatives can hold the status and it is feasible for a CIC to make an IPO and hold PLC status. It also provides individuals with a simple legal structure to engage with their chosen community issue.

The CIC legislation was introduced as a legal form under the Companies Act 2006 and subject to that Act and company law generally.

The primary core features of any company holding CIC status are two fold;

- Assets owned by the company are held in an asset lock which secures those assets to applications for the good use of community.
- Limitations applied to dividend and interest payments made to shareholders and financiers ensure a profit can be made, but the primary focus remains on achieving benefit for the community.

Both of these features are regulated by the Community Interest Company Regulator via an annual report, known as the CIC34, which is submitted to the Regulators office on an annual basis. The Community Interest Company Regulator's office is a part of Companies House and governed by The Department for Business, Innovation and Skill – BIS.

The range of industries and markets that CICs are forming within is as varied as the economy itself – the majority currently within traditional Third sector activity areas such as Health and Social Care, Education and Community Services, but with an ever increasing number trading in traditional private sector activities such as property, financial and other professional services.

The liability of each member is limited to £1, being the amount that each member undertakes to contribute to the assets of the Company in the event of its being wound up while he or she is a member or within one year after he or she ceases to be a member, for:

Designed for companies where all the directors are members of the company and all of whose members are directors of the company. It assumes that the directors will take most important decisions as directors rather than as members, and that directors may hold office continuously for long periods of time without offering themselves for re-election. It also allows, subject to certain minimum procedural safeguards, for relatively informal decision-making by directors (including by exchanges of e-mail).

However, as it develops and grows it would be expected to change to a Community Interest Company, Limited by Guarantee (not for profit) **with a large membership**

Designed for companies that have more members than they have directors. Although it assumes that the directors will take most day to day decisions about the company's business, it also gives the members a strong role in controlling the overall governance of the company. It includes provision for some of the directors to retire and offer themselves for re-election each year. The procedures for decision-making by directors are more formal than in the other model constitutions.

### **Examples of tourist community interest companies and other models for delivering tourist information**

Many examples of tourism related Community Interest Companies exist (google tourist community interest companies or visit <https://www.visitengland.com> where relevant tourist destination / tourist information organisations are listed. )

**They appear to offer two services:**

**A) Offering traditional tourist information – what to do, what to see, where to stay.**

These appear to be in partnership with local councils. Geographical area determines whether it is a county, district or town council partnership.

**B) Destination organisations**

Aims tend to be building a thriving visitor economy that brings great benefits to all who visit, live, work or invest in the area

**Services offered include:**

- Providing information and services (including tourist information points)
- Signage
- Promotion and marketing including branding
- Events programme
- Manage event volunteers, walk leaders, heritage enthusiasts, photographers, leaflet distributors etc
- Joint marketing and collaboration
- Training for business owners, staff and prospective start-ups eg in customer service, quality standards
- Providing networking opportunities for local tourism businesses
- Conduct visitor surveys
- Act as a gatekeeper to business grants, planning advice, green tourism support.
- Quality accreditation
- Regular updates
- An agreed vision, plan

**References:**

[www.hebridian-tourism.org](http://www.hebridian-tourism.org)

[www.southcopelandtourism.org.uk](http://www.southcopelandtourism.org.uk)

<https://www.visitcornwall.com/>

<http://www.visitnorwich.co.uk/home/about-visit-norwich/>

<http://welcometopickering.co.uk/>

<https://www.visitengland.com>

<http://www.discover.folkestone.towntalk.co.uk>

[www.visiteastbourne.co.uk](http://www.visiteastbourne.co.uk)

<https://www.falmouth.co.uk>

[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)