



**CITY OF ELY COUNCIL
TOURISM AND TOWN CENTRE COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF TOURISM AND TOWN CENTRE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD AT
SESSIONS HOUSE, LYNN ROAD, ELY AT
7.00 PM MONDAY 11th DECEMBER 2023**

THOSE PRESENT:

Cllr D Warman (Chair), Cllr P Gardner, Cllr Chris Phillips
Cllr R Ward, Cllr C Ni Dhonaill, Cllr R Trent

Mrs Anna Bennett (Tourism and Town Centre Manager)

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr M Banyard. Cllr D Warman introduced herself to Cllr R Trent.

2. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of last Tourism and Town Centre Meeting held Monday 16th October 2023

The minutes of the last meeting held October 16th were signed by the Chairman, Cllr D Warman as a true record. TTC 89/90/91 refer.

4. To receive an update on the Service

Mrs Bennett gave an overview regarding the service provided to the city. It was explained to the committee that although coach bookings have finished until February 2024, there had been a few last-minute bookings and private tours. Mrs Bennett said she was very pleased with the 2024 bookings already in place, and that there was a significant increase in Ely Experience's – a direct result from GLT which took place in October. Plans are afoot for further collaboration with Cambs bid for joint day visits and a shopping/lunch/attraction day experience in collaboration with Ben's Yard. The footfall figures were reported from last meeting to date with admissions and income, which considering the time of year, is above average.

Mrs Bennett reported that the shop sales are continually improving with the Senior TIC Assistant, Miss Thompson making the right decisions regarding purchasing/sales/layout and overall upkeep. The shop has never performed so well, with budgets already achieved halfway through the financial year.

Costume donations (including the body armour) are now on display in front of the Cromwell portrait, plus two further mannequins in costume, giving the attraction more authentication and

added value for visitors. The costumes for the guides team/events are now in order, with all cottons refreshed for the 2024 season.

A brief update on the recent guides visit to Ribe was given, and the value the trip added for both Mrs Bennett, the guides and organiser, Mr R G Hughes. Mrs Bennett explained that a presentation would take place at next Full Council meeting in January 2024 by Ms A Heffernan, Chair of the Ribe Association.

A welcome meeting for new guides and end of year update is arranged for the 12/12/23. It was explained that a voluntary role as a co-ordinator would be helpful to manage bookings. Mrs N Gardner accepted the post and will work with Mrs Bennett in the new year.

The Escape Room offering to Ely continues to thrive with a new game launching March 2024, with sell out games throughout October. Plans afoot to re-create a whole house experience, ready for launch in Feb 2024, together with a Murder Mystery. The committee fed back that they were interested in testing the game. Mrs Bennett would update them with further information at the next TTC meeting.

Praise was given to the team behind the 'Santa's Trug' high street shopping initiative. The donations from the retailers were very generous. Mrs Bennett asked the Mayor, Cllr Chris Phillips if he would assist when the draw takes place, 18/12/23 with the winner announced thereafter.

A full 2024 diary for Visit Ely Events was discussed. Cllr Ward and other Cllrs discussed the Christmas lights and the CofE recognition. Points were raised about the non-recognition of the contributions from CofE Council, and how that can be better rectified. Cllrs did suggest removing involvement. Mrs Bennett suggested that these points be raised at the Christmas Lights sub-committee and to liaise with Mrs S Jay regarding this. Mrs Bennett raised the issue of lack of comms/PR for the CofE Council, and that there should be a designated spokesperson to reply to any future negative comments regarding Christmas Lights. This should be a member of the Comms team. Cllr Warman agreed and would take the matter to the next meeting.

A Sales and Events summary was provided to the committee with successful results/sell out performances/tours all round. This included the Trials of Terror at Sessions house, of which there is a waiting list for the 2024 dates.

Visitor Guide 2024 is 90% complete. Mrs Bennett explained that it had been another successful campaign, with pages selling out almost immediately, with a clear demand to be part of the book for 2024. The front cover for the 2024 guide was greatly received by the committee and they very much liked Mrs Bennett's ideas for merchandise/spotter trails and getting the most out of the artwork. Deals were offered to those taking print ads and digital ads, as explained further in the minutes.

Mrs Bennett concluded her presentation to the committee with an update on Travel Shows for 2024 and that she will be attending 'Excursions' in January with a team from Ely Cathedral. It was also explained that for 2025 it would be beneficial to explore other UK travel shows to attract visitors to Ely from the North of the UK – with overnight stays. This is in working progress.

5.To discuss budget updates.

There were no major discussions apart from Cllr Warman's point that the budget looks better than it ever has, and that we should be proud of our merchandise income to date.

6.To discuss Session House Tours

Mrs Bennett discussed the current tours that run on Saturday's and the trials. Cllr Chris Phillips commented that it was a pity there was not a book written about the building. Mrs Bennett explained that all research is through google, and guides knowledge. Visit Ely will continue to use the building when available to increase the tours/events remit.

7.To discuss the use of volunteers to assist Visit Ely in providing their service

Cllr M Banyard is planning a meeting to discuss in the new year. Mrs Bennett re-iterated how a group of volunteers would be useful for field events.

8.To receive an update regarding the digital signage project progress and Visit Ely app.

A brief overview of signage and app development was discussed. Mrs Bennett encouraged the committee to use the app and give positive praise to the signage. It was also explained that faults need to be reported to her via email. Ad sales reported were good, with a ring-fenced a/c code created by the RFO so the committee can monitor sales over the new year.

9. To discuss setting up a Sessions House working group

Cllr D Warman suggested to the committee members to set up a working group to discuss events at Sessions House. It has been a request by Mr Ted Coney (local artist) to utilise the building on a more regular basis. The councillors collectively commented that maybe a pitch should be presented at the next Assets meeting to discuss. Cllr Warman said she would contact Ted Coney to further investigate. All Cllrs mentioned that Visit Ely were already pursuing events, and that needs to be communicated back to Mr Coney.

10. Date of next meeting

The next TTC meeting will be held Feb 5th 2024

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm