

# 1066 Country Attractions Meeting

## White Rock Theatre

15 November 2024

**Attendance:** Jane Ellis (1066 Country Marketing), Tim McDonald (Shipwreck Museum), David and Linda Carr Taylor (Carr Taylor Vineyard), Anthony and Natalie Skinner (Camber Kite Surf and E-Bike Hire), Clare Whippy (Playland Amusements, Hastings), Connor Kinloch (Flamingo Amusements, Hastings), Kevin Dixon (Luxury Leisure), Chris Beveridge (Knockhatch), Rosie Field, Laura Bateman and Fraser Ward (White Rock Theatre), Simon Parsons (Rye Heritage Centre), Gesine Garz (Rye Harbour Nature Reserve and Discovery Centre), Heather Packham (Kent & East Sussex Railway), Oli Rogers (Hastings Museum & Art Gallery), James Rigby and Katherine Kim (Hastings Aquarium, Smugglers, Castle), Chris Beveridge (Knockhatch), Cllr Vikki Cooke (The Almonry, Battle), Rohan Jayasekera (Bexhill Museum), Sophia McNab (Hastings Contemporary)

**Apologies received:** Natasha Williams and Lucy Dering (Battle Abbey, Pevensey Castle, EH), Lucy Evans (Bateman's and Bodiam Castle, NT), Chantal Palmer (Charles Palmer Vineyard), Liz and Tim (Flower Makers Museum), Kate Wilson (Pashley Manor Gardens), Dan and Ross (Spun Glass Theatre)

Many thanks to the White Rock Theatre for hosting the meeting.

**DATE FOR YOUR DIARIES - Next attractions group meeting.**

**Friday 14 March 2025. 10.15 for 10.30 – 12.30 Discovery Centre, Rye Harbour Nature Reserve.**

### 1. Presentation of 1066 Country Team marketing activity since February meeting

This will be available on the members' area of the website and is an update on various strands of activity over the months since our last meeting in February, including website performance, social media campaign 2024, international campaigns, press activity, visitor guide distribution, collaborations with Southern Railway, membership services, new projects for 2025 – 2027. (Password for the members' area: Love1066Country).

The anomaly of 15k visits to the website from Poland was confirmed as bot traffic and is consistent with the bot attack across the entire web from Poland. It is believed that this was an attempt to show in GA4 profiles and drive users to investigate to drive clicks to their site - although this is just hypothesised. This has not been harmful to the site although it has slightly skewed GA4 data closer to the start of the year. Google has since put filters in place to stop this specific bot attack so no further action was/is needed.

### 2. 1066 Country Attractions Staff Pass

One [Staff Pass](#) has been issued to Connected Families who have 'joined the membership' with the majority support of the attractions' group. One Connected Coach (Connected Families (ESCC)) staff member + client only can use the pass with proof of work ID at any one time, weekends only, at the list of attractions on the website, with one exception. Please make your staff at ticket desks aware of this one exception to the use of the staff pass.

### **3. Rother Valley Railway & Kent & East Sussex Railway, Bodiam - Robertsbridge line extension**

The group welcomed Derrick Bilsby, director of the Kent & East Sussex Railway to give us an update on the multi-million-pound project to date. There are three organisations involved: Rother Valley Railway Heritage Trust – who are financing the project; Rother Valley Railway Ltd – the construction company; the Kent & East Sussex Railway Ltd – who are licenced to operate the existing railway and who will operate the extension to Robertsbridge.

60 years of work has now culminated in the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on 31 May 2024. Work has begun and preparations to build are underway. To preserve wild like habitats the line will encompass a 13-mile linear nature reserve.

Not without challenges along the way. Austin's Bridge needed repairs after being vandalized following the public enquiry. These are now nearing completion. Work on the flood plain next to the A21 and designs in conjunction with the Environment Agency to mitigate flood risk are also nearing completion, with construction expected to commence Spring 2025.

#### **Timeline for crossings through to operational trains running.**

There will be three level crossings (B2244, North Bridge Street, A 21) with the final crossing planned to be completed by Spring 2026. The design of the operation is such that should the equipment develop a fault road traffic will not be stopped, the trains will. Crossings will be all fitted with radar to ensure safety. Track components will begin to be laid from Summer 2025 on the section between the B2244 and the approaches to Salehurst village. In 2027 'Ghost trains' are planned to run, the intention is to involve local communities trialling the journeys before opening to the general public in 2028.

The project is also to receive £150k grant to complete Robertsbridge Junction Station.

**What benefits will be brought to the area?** 60 years ago, when the railway was brought back to life, there were undoubtedly objections. Nowadays for every £1 spent on the railway, £4 is spent in Tenterden. It is hoped to generate this return on investment to the Sussex end of the line too. The direct Southeastern line from Charing Cross/ London Bridge - Hastings and other large towns such as Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks and Orpington will allow much easier access to the K&ESR for passengers not wishing/able to travel by car, especially overseas visitors. It is very attractive in sustainable terms, as it will take cars off the road in the county and will act as a gateway to the rural attractions of 1066 Country for a wider audience.

Southeastern are working in close collaboration with the RVR and K&ESR. There is also the potential of more promotion via the 200th anniversary of the railways in 2025 and 800th anniversary of the Robertsbridge Farmers' Line. For more detailed information see [here](#)

### **4. Attractions Updates**

#### **Luxury Leisure, Playland and Flamingo Amusements**

Good summer and half term. Plans for Christmas include free Christmas grottos and elves workshops.

#### **Rye Harbour Nature Reserve**

179k visitors over financial year 23/24 to the Discovery Centre, with an estimated 400k visitors to the reserve in general. Summer and half term were very busy. There is now a dedicated events and

education team so more courses and events are happening. Makers' Market for Christmas 23 & 24 November.

### **White Rock Theatre**

Investment going on in the theatre, with spaces being renovated across the building. New large scale events, such as Games Fest 25 & 26 January, Hastings Comic Con – 14 & 15 June 2025. Laura very keen to collaborate on various projects with member attractions around the table and will be in touch.

Jane to investigate Brochure Connect providing a stand at the theatre.

### **Hastings Contemporary**

Slow start to the summer but picked up towards the end. Spend is down in the shop. Wanting to collaborate across other member attractions too (N.B. Hastings Aquarium with HC's 2025 exhibition 'Undersea' 29 March 2025 – 14 September 2025). Sophia praised the 1066 Country membership subscription as being very good value and thanked the team for its work.

Sophia, Laura from the White Rock Theatre, and Jane all encouraged members to really make use of the supportive attractions/ membership group that we have as 1066 Country Marketing partnership. Sophia also mentioned Tina Morris who organises Coastal Currents as being another galvanising force in Hastings.

### **Rye Heritage Centre**

Visitor numbers are growing with a great start to the year, with a doubled revenue for Easter, but tailed off and has not been matched by growth in revenue unfortunately, which has become unpredictable. There seems to have been a change in attitude among consumers over the last few years to taking advantage more of free things to do. Group bookings are static so are looking to grow these. Increase has been seen in overseas visitors and credit as given to the 1066 Country team for its work.

External community event was held in summer – this year's theme was '450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fletcher Family'. New light & sound show WWII which debuted the 8 & 9 November for Remembrance commemorations. Will be shown from time to time through the year. The success of this has now given more confidence to create ghost story and Christmas themed shows too.

Challenges: Environment Agency improvement works opposite the building. Lost one week of trading.

For the future: two year plan in place to separate trading activities. Need to find new ways to increase revenue and return the centre to its 'heritage' theme. This winter should see progress on the plan made and if revenue can grow, potentially employ another member of staff alongside the volunteers. Also planning how to work more closely with youth organisations and schools.

### **Knockhatch**

Knockhatch had 68K visitors fewer from July – August 2024, down by 3K compared to the same period in 2023.

Thankfully a successful marketing campaign across META, Google & Tik Tok increased our users and sessions to [knockhatch.com](https://knockhatch.com) by 47%+. Chris would be happy to be contacted on any of the below if you'd like to discuss further.

Time your posts to suit your market (you can Google when are good times to post) – e.g Knockhatch targeted schools for around a week (before half term??), timed for end of day while parents waiting for kids to come out of school gates. £15/day. Facebook was most beneficial in this respect. TikTok on the back burner for now.

[Google Performance Max](#) had lowest Cost Per Conversion (ccp) at £2.57

User generated content consistently performed well across all platforms.

**Instagram** – Chris advises to change business category (‘Category’ button on your profile) to ‘Entrepreneur’, which will enable you to accept collaboration requests from influencers. This setting allows you to use any music featured on reels.

Carousels - Instagram is favouring both photos and videos in this format. Plan to post a healthy balance between reels, photos and carousels. Share posts to stories on a 24 hours rotation. Try to comment on other @1066country posts and reply to your own followers’ comments.

**Google Business** - Add photos, videos and events to your profile. Reply to reviews. In the last 90 days 31,785 people viewed Knockhatch’s Google Business profile.

**Events** - Use the <https://www.visit1066country.com/whats-on/submit-event> Image dimensions are: 1220 pixels wide by 695 pixels high. This will show up on Google searches.

**Case study** - Look at [Tulley’s Farm](#). They target heavily the London market. 4,000 visitors to their ‘Scaretober’ event on a Wednesday evening *before* half term. 17,000 visitors on the previous Saturday. Nearly all visitors coming from the London area. Tulley’s is located in Crawley. <https://www.tulleysfarm.com/>

### **Camber Kitesurfing and Ebike Hire**

Kitesurfing has concentrated on consolidating this year. Biggest shake up in Camber has just happened with the Kitesurf Centre just going on the market as a business (it’s the largest in the UK). Anthony gauging what to do for next year – potentially could be good for his business and taking on new instructors (which are really hard to find), but uncertain times at the moment. Running a couple of kite camps next year where participants stay on site or in nearby Air BnB. All immersive week includes kitesurfing, SUP, kayaking, cycling but primarily you go to learn to kitesurf in a week.

Ebike Hire – slow start due to weather, improvement once schools broke up. Business dropped off now.

### **Shipwreck Museum**

85k visitors this year – bad weather is good for museums. 1,200 visitors in one day this summer. Now in the museum yard they have the two historic lifeboats which were on the A259 at the entrance to the Old Town. Bought covers for The Primrose and hope to be able to buy two for the lifeboats. Coastal Users Group is pushing for Hastings to rejoin the 1066 Country partnership somehow. Tim recorded his dissatisfaction with the underhand manner in which the two politicians instigated the withdrawal of HBC from the 1066 Country Marketing partnership.

### **Bexhill Museum**

The target of 20k visitors this year stands at 16k currently so hope to reach this for 2024/5. New additions to the collection include the town’s first fire engine. £500k worth of work needed to the structure of the building and the collections. Have received a grant from the DCMS for £500k to

complete this and may be able to operate the museum as normal while work is carried out. Potentially adding another couple of education rooms, increasing the number of special interest groups and research space for archaeology.

### **Discover Hastings**

Hastings Castle lease not being renewed for Aspro to run from the new financial year. Troika Ltd who are redeveloping the area on the West Hill will likely be managing the castle, though according to HBC officer this has yet to be finalised after the new year.

Aquarium – low numbers in the summer. Varied October half term. The aquarium has joined up with the Hastings Kelp project.

Smugglers Adventure – very successful event (sold out) with the screening in the caves of ‘Magick Hastings’ and looking to do more events and promote the caves (and aquarium too) as event venues.

### **Kent & East Sussex Railway**

Excellent response to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary events that have been run throughout 2024. They have also tapped into the ‘enthusiasts’ market. Group travel remains strong. Planned charters, small and often groups, help with the regular income flow. 30% increase in income in August. Kids Go Free promotion in the summer. Other big attractions included the Mr Doodle train, a guest locomotive, Fright Night (sold out). Magic Express saw disappointing numbers. Santa Specials are already 92% sold out – playing on the ‘making memories’ theme. Packages have been refreshed for this Christmas and are offering premium packages this year with enhanced catering offer too.

2025 sees the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bodiam opening. Rother Valley Catering elements next year will offer hot food on the move (standard, in addition to the already luxury Pullman offer).

### **The Almonry, Battle**

Councillor Vikki Cooke reported on behalf of the Almonry. The town’s businesses have just met to discuss a marketing and tourism strategy for Battle, linking heritage sites with businesses in the town. Vikki attended a conference in Caen, Normandy, regarding the 1000<sup>th</sup> birthday commemorations of William of Normandy in 2024. The international event will celebrate Norman heritage internationally (wherever the Normans were present) and there are strong UK links for Battle with Winchester, Dover and Norwich. Various ideas in the pipeline, including a visitor trail across these four areas of the UK.

### **Carr Taylor Vineyards**

Carr Taylor processes the grapes for over 200 small growers in the area, making wine for them. Disappointing harvest this year due to mould/weather. 120 tonnes of grapes in 2023 v 35 tonnes 2024. 10% down on tours this year. Smaller groups this year for tours. Now selling to six local supermarkets and two farm shops.

The vineyard is now producing a specific product as a main ingredient for Barbados rum. For the fourth year running they have been in Trip Advisor’s top 10% of the world’s tourism attractions. Recently won three silver medals in each category entered of the international [Glass of Bubbly Awards](#) (Dessert/ Spring Fling/ Summer Days categories).

Thanks were given for the 1066 Country team’s work.

## **Hastings Museum and Art Gallery**

Very good year – beat targets for revenue and visitor numbers. Big events put on, Sanctuary Festival, Heroes’ Journey, Trans Pride. Black Joy exhibition attracting visitors from London. Dinosaur gallery being redeveloped along with other aspects of the gallery.

The Museum Association’s ‘Museums Change Lives Awards 2024’: Best Small Museum Project category: Illuminating Invisible Histories: [Flavours Without Borders](#).

## **Updates in absentia from Battle Abbey, Charles Palmer Vineyards, Pashley Manor Gardens**

### **Battle Abbey**

The focus at the moment is ‘Illuminated Abbey’ event early December and Christmas in general. Halloween Half Term was a good week numbers wise. Running about the same YOY for visitors (April 2024 to now), but Battle of Hastings was slightly quieter (relatively speaking) than last year, partly because the weather in the run up meant that we couldn’t use the field for parking on the weekend and had to ask people to use local carparks which may have stopped some people attending. Events in general for EH have performed slightly less well this year than last year which they believe is probably at least partially due to cost of living (events have an uplift) and some election uncertainty earlier in the year.

### **Charles Palmer Vineyards**

Summer was incredibly busy – alongside usual clientele, lovely flow of international bookings including Norwegians, Tasmanians and even Estonian wine makers and sommeliers who bought us their local tea and cheese as gifts.

Grape harvest was not only very late this year but difficult too due to the weather.

Wine tastings have gone rather quiet (apart from weekends) but lots of December bookings.

Online sales have noticeably increased recently thanks to the Kate Humble programme “Coastal Britain” starring Sally Palmer in the vineyard!

Event shout out; Wreath making on 8<sup>th</sup> December and our Cellar Door Christmas Party on 14<sup>th</sup> December – this will include a tour of the new winery at 1pm and 3pm – check out social media for more info.

### **Pashley Manor Gardens**

Poor weather coincided and therefore impacted on all their events this year.

## **5. Business Plan**

Melanie Powell, Economic Development and Regeneration manager at Rother District Council gave a short update on the new Business Plan. The plan can be found [here](#) on the members’ area of the website. **Password to access the members’ area: Love1066Country**

## **6. Attractions representatives on the 1066 Country Marketing Executive Board**

Many thanks to Chris Beveridge and Ian Roberts who have served as our attractions reps and have now stepped down from their positions in accordance with the conditions of the new executive board being elected. They are still eligible for re-election.

These positions are traditionally elected by the attractions group. The two positions have already been advertised to the membership in general. Jane to resend the information for applications for these positions. For more information, please see the end of this document\*.

## **AOB**

### **Kevin Dixon from Luxury Leisure**

Hastings' businesses are at a disadvantage with no councillor support for the partnership. Hastings' businesses are in the dark about what is happening about the promotion of Hastings. What is being spent? He suggested inviting a HBC officer to update on HBC's plans for tourism and could include an update on the West Hill/Hastings Castle development. **Jane to investigate and report back.**

## **Reporting back**

### **My email on behalf of Attractions group to HBC officer**

At our recent 1066 attractions meeting, there was a lot of pondering (criticism) going on among our Hastings tourism member businesses as to the promotion (or lack thereof) of Hastings. They'd asked would it be possible for someone to come along to explain how the £15k in the current tourism pot is being spent, and also to give an overview of the castle development. Do you think that would be possible if we called a meeting?

I don't think there is anyone now who has tourism as their dedicated role at HBC as Sarah French's and my roles appear to have quietly disappeared off the pay roll when we left, so I'm not sure who we'd ask? What would you advise please?

### **Response received from Hastings Borough Council officer**

I think Cllr Bates responded to you recently regarding our current position in supporting tourism work. Unfortunately, the situation has not changed.

Happy to keep you informed of the progress with the Castle project on a regular basis.

### **Below is the response from Cllr Bates as referred to above (we had requested a meeting with her via email sent 28 October. She responded 12 November).**

At the moment, HBC is unfortunately in no position to consider any additional tourism costs, nor rejoining 1066.

To give you an idea; our current yearly budget is around £15,000 for the entire year - with no guarantee moving into the next Budget. I understand that being a part of 1066 is over 3xs that amount. We have no Tourism Officer.

As I shared with Mandy Curtis recently, 1066 is not a decision we are anywhere near being able to consider; currently in Cabinet, as we prepare for the Budget, we are having to examine every cost next to whether it is more pressing that housing our 1000+ people waiting for a home to live in, in Hastings. I am sure you'll agree that, that must be paramount.

If the situation changes, myself and/or Senior Officer Victoria will reach out to meet with Stephen (sic – she means Stewart Drew, current chair of 1066 Country Marketing) to find out more about how 1066 has developed since we left, however I would emphasis (sic) that this is regrettably unlikely in the foreseeable future. At the moment, HBC is unfortunately in no position to consider any

additional tourism costs, nor rejoining 1066.

**DATE FOR YOUR DIARIES - Next attractions group meeting.**

**Friday 14 March 2025. 10.15 for 10.30 – 12.30 Discovery Centre, Rye Harbour Nature Reserve.**

Gesine has kindly offered space at the centre as it's Rye's turn to host.

**\*Role of attractions' representatives**

For each role we are looking for someone who:

- Owns / runs a tourism, hospitality or leisure business that is a member of 1066 County partnership.
- Can be present at 4 x Exec Board meetings a year – held in venues across the 1066 area.
- Can be the channel of communication between the members they represent and the Board – so provide updates to the Board and take information back to members.
- Will hold at least one meeting a year with the members they represent.
- Will actively work to find new business to become members and support the work of 1066 Country.
- Each elected member will be offered free Gold membership for each year they work for the Board. For more information see:  
[www.visit1066country.com/dbimsgs/1066%20country%20member%20pack%20UPDATE%20022%20.pdf](http://www.visit1066country.com/dbimsgs/1066%20country%20member%20pack%20UPDATE%20022%20.pdf)
- We are asking applicants to an application form in which you will be asked to outline your work in the tourism/hospitality/leisure sector and say how you would support the work of 1066 Country Marketing. This will go out to the attractions group to vote on in the event of more than two nominations.
- The next Exec Bord meeting with new members will take place January 16<sup>th</sup> 2025 with a pre meeting induction.