

BLUE SAIL▶

VISITORS PLACES DESTINATIONS

LEWES TOURIST INFORMATION SERVICE REVIEW

REPORT FOR LEWES DISTRICT COUNCIL

APRIL 2025

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1. LEWES TIC BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

Blue Sail were commissioned to explore the tourist information requirements for visitors to the town of Lewes, to identify the services to be provided and consider different options for where a Tourist Information Centre (TIC) should be located, if anywhere at all, or if there was an alternative way forward.

In order to do this, there is a need to step back and ask yourself ‘what do we want to achieve’? Do we want more visitors, higher spending visitors, a better pattern of year-round visits, visitors who stay longer, or new visitor segments? How do we want our local community, businesses and economy to benefit from tourists? To answer these questions fully, is a bigger piece of work than we have been asked to do. We have however sought to use these questions, to unpick what the town needs in interviews with stakeholders and through our survey work among residents, businesses and visitors.

Visitor needs must be at the heart of decisions about the services that should be provided. We have supplemented available local data with insights from national and regional studies and data sources. This gives us a picture of who Lewes’ visitors are and what they want.

This work found that as well as servicing the needs of visitors, the TIC is a valuable asset for local communities, signposting to ‘what’s on’ in Lewes and supporting local groups, societies and organisations with developing their audiences. Our analysis and recommendations have attempted to balance the needs and requirements of these different types of TIC user.

While the temporary move of the TIC from 187 High St to 6 High St has led to concern in the local community, the TIC is just one part of the range of services that a destination can use to attract, welcome and serve visitors. Though a TIC is a valuable asset, it is important to consider it in the context of the other services Lewes provides to attract visitors.

The financial pressure on local government is well documented and each authority has difficult choices to make. We have sought to find solutions which are cost effective and that maximise benefits to Lewes at the lowest cost to the authority.

THE LEWES VISITOR OFFER AND ITS AUDIENCES

Lewes is a historic market town – the county town of East Sussex, and part of the wider Lewes District. It has a population of around 17,000¹. It sits in a gap of the South Downs about 7 miles northeast of Brighton. The town has good connections via the A27 road which runs east-west along the coast and connects with the A23/M23 to London and there are excellent rail connections east/west and north with direct trains to Gatwick and London.

Lewes receives around 4.46m trips² (4.21m day trips and 0.25m overnight trips) which together account for £131m of spend in the local economy (just over half of which comes from day visitors and just under half from staying visitors). Taking into account multipliers (supplier and induced income) tourism accounts for £179m of spend in the local area. About 53,000 overseas visitors are among the 251,000 staying visitors. Around 3170 jobs are directly supported by tourism with another 770 in non-tourism related jobs (as a result of the supplier & induced spend) meaning around 11.3% of the local population are employed because of tourism.

The visitor offer

The visitor offer is varied and extensive for a town of this size. Notable town attractions and experiences include:

- ▶ Lewes Bonfire Celebrations (which receives around 80,000 visitors)
- ▶ Lewes Castle
- ▶ Ruins of Lewes Priory
- ▶ Bull House (home of Thomas Paine)
- ▶ Anne of Cleves House
- ▶ Southover Grange and Gardens
- ▶ Charleston in Lewes
- ▶ Harvey's Brewery Tours
- ▶ Pells Pool Lido
- ▶ Depot Cinema

¹ ONS Census 2021

² Cambridge Economic Impact Study 2023

The town has an extensive independent retail offer, there are many antique shops and a few markets. Just outside the town are other significant attractions including Glyndebourne, Firle, Ditchling, the South Downs National Park and a multitude of walks, vineyards and cultural experiences.

The strong heritage and cultural offer of Lewes is an obvious attraction for visitors. Visitor accommodation is relatively limited in Lewes town. Serviced accommodation includes:

- ▶ The White Hart
- ▶ Premier Inn
- ▶ The Grain Store
- ▶ Monty's Accommodation

There are a reasonable number of B&Bs, self-catered accommodation and short term lets in the town and surrounding area. Key drivers for why tourists select Lewes according to TripAdvisor are:

- ▶ Historical Significance
- ▶ Cultural Events (ex: opera, theatre, Bonfire Night)
- ▶ Natural Beauty, Proximity to/Association with the South Downs National Park, Views
- ▶ Shopping and Dining (authentic local restaurants and shopping, quaint nature of town)
- ▶ Proximity to Hubs (Brighton, London)

Visitor profile

There is little primary data on visitors to Lewes, so we have had to draw on other sources to try to determine who is visiting and where from.

Based on 2023/2024 enquirers to the TIC the most common overseas markets visiting are the USA, Germany, France, Netherlands, Spain, Australia and New Zealand.

Postcode analysis for visitors to Charleston in Lewes is helpful in trying to understand where visitors might journey from. The data shows that the following postcodes are the most frequent buyers of tickets to exhibitions:

Shows:	Grayson Perry & Collecting Modernism	Bring No Clothes	Hepworth/Preece & Duos
Most frequent ticket purchasing postcodes	BN1 – central Brighton BN3 - Hove BN2 – Brighton east BN7 - Lewes BN25 - Seaford BN21 - Eastbourne BN43 - Shoreham TN22 – Uckfield	BN7 - Lewes BN1 – central Brighton BN2 – Brighton east BN3 - Hove BN8 – Ringmer/ N Chailey BN25 - Seaford BN20 – Eastbourne/E Dean BN21 – Eastbourne	BN7 - Lewes BN1 – central Brighton BN2 – Brighton east BN3 - Hove BN8 – Ringmer/ N Chailey BN25 - Seaford BN20 – Eastbourne/E Dean BN21 – Eastbourne

This clearly demonstrates that most visits are drawn from a 30-45 minute journey time.

Other studies that give data into who visits also offer some insight for Lewes:

Organisation and source docs	Existing visitors		Commentary/insights
	Trip type -Day/Staying/overseas – and frequency	Characteristics/Segment/Profile	
SDNPA <i>Customer Segmentation and Market proposition 2018</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 78% day visitors (89% local – Surrey, Sussex or Hampshire) Half of staying visitors from a local or regional catchment (London and surrounding counties) 5% overseas – USA, Germany, Netherlands, Australia, France 60% frequent visitors (at least once every 6 months) Less than a fifth first time visitors (higher for staying) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 40% are visiting as a couple, increasing to 50% amongst staying visitors 28% families (more likely day visitors) Three quarters (75%) of visiting parties did not have children in them Day visitors evenly spread across all age groups. Staying more likely to be from older age groups (55 years+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Older couples and parties without children are the main domestic overnight market Families are more likely to be on day trips from home using the national park as a local outdoor playground SDNP attracts a high number of repeat visits – established and loyal visitor base
East Sussex County Council <i>East Sussex Data Warehouse - GBDVS, GBTS, IPS,</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately 40% are day visitors from home Nearly 40% are on a day trip from holiday accommodation 20% are overnight visitors with 83% from Kent, London, Essex and Surrey 41% Visiting Friends & Relatives 81% holidaymakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mosaic Profile A City Prosperity – high earners, city living, no children, 26-35 Mosaic Profile B Prestige Positions – significant disposable income, grown up children, 56-65 Mosaic Profile C - Country Living – well off homeowners, rurally-based, grown up children, 56-65 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local visitor base, even those staying overnight – ‘holiday on the doorstep’ Short breaks prevail (1-3 nights) Four of the five most represented segments have no children or grown-up children

Organisation and source docs	Existing visitors		Commentary/insights
	Trip type -Day/Staying/overseas – and frequency	Characteristics/Segment/Profile	
<i>Destination Survey (2009-2012), Mosaic groups</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 56% staying in a seaside location • 66% are staying 1-3 nights • Overseas visitors – Germany (20%), France (10%), Netherlands (8%), USA (7%) • Nearly 30% are first time visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mosaic Profile E - Senior Security – elderly singles and couples, 66+, no children • Mosaic Profile G - Domestic Success – family with children, disposable income, 36-45 • 51% visiting as a couple • 25% of domestic overnight visitors 65+ 	

Recent segmentation research for Sussex³, as part of work for the shadow LVEP, has highlighted target markets for Sussex among international audiences and UK domestic travellers. International priority markets are the USA and Germany with Canada, France and the Netherlands also having a good fit with the Sussex offer. These best prospect segments have been identified based on their likelihood to deliver value via longer overnight stays and engagement with a range of activities across the county.

UK	WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY WANT	INTERNATIONAL	WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY WANT
Country-Loving Traditionalists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Couples aged 50+ travelling without children Mid-affluence living in Southeast England Countryside breaks Heritage, outdoors & experiencing local culture – including food & drink 	Explorers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typically 45+ travelling without children Largest segment in Germany & Netherlands. Significant in France, Canada & USA Mid-affluence; overseas trips a priority Like a relaxed pace in small cities/countryside Heritage, outdoors & experiencing local culture – including food & drink
Free & Easy Mini-Breakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under 35s travelling without children Willing to spend on trips City breaks Trips packed with activities & experiences Events, culture, boutique accommodation, quality food & drink Public transport & good digital connectivity 	Experience Seekers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under 35s travelling without children Largest segment in USA, Canada & France Frequent travellers & will spend on experiences Cities, plus rural locations that offer 'only here' experiences (e.g. active outdoors, events) Boutique accommodation, quality food & drink Public transport & good digital connectivity

³ [Blue Sail, 2022](#)

Though there are differences between who lives in a destination and who visits, the dominant Audience Agency Profiles for BN7 are nonetheless worth considering – especially given the significance of the TIC in meeting the needs of both visitors and the local community. The dominant Audience Spectrum⁴ profiles for Lewes are:

- ▶ Commuterland Culturebuffs (23% of total) – empty nesters with considerable disposable income and time to indulge in a wide range of interests and leisure activities
- ▶ Dormitory Dependables (21%) - families of all ages, with typical educational backgrounds, solid careers and the means to enjoy their time as they please, both at home and abroad
- ▶ Experience Seekers (14%) - highly active, social and career-minded singles and couples are younger people engaging with the arts on a regular basis
- ▶ Home and Heritage (13%) - An older group of retired or semi-retired homeowners, living on modest pensions and spending their time enjoying reading, gardening and period dramas

All this points towards some dominant markets which are to be found in Lewes:

- ▶ Older couples – similar to the VisitEngland segment ‘Country Loving Traditionalists’
- ▶ Active younger couples – similar to the VisitEngland segment ‘Free & Easy Mini Breaker’

While a far smaller proportion of visits, international visitors are valuable to Lewes as they tend to stay longer and spend more. The USA, France, Netherlands, Germany and Canada are the most attractive markets with segments skewed to older couples. Other visitor market segments will be present and will for example include families though these are less common than surrounding destinations including those on the coast.

⁴ <https://audiencespectrum.org/en/map>

COMMUNITY RESOURCE

It is evident how strongly residents and local communities (including businesses) feel about the TIC. With almost 1000 responses to the TIC survey from residents and over 65 business respondents, there is a strong view from locals that the TIC is an important resource for the town. This is reinforced by TIC staff who indicate the majority of users are local people, and the minority are visitors. Benefits of a TIC are seen as:

- ▶ Providing information
- ▶ Promoting local businesses/events
- ▶ Welcoming visitors
- ▶ Serving as a community hub

The TIC is seen, by locals and businesses, as crucial for tourism, community engagement, and promoting local heritage/events. For some it is evidence of confidence in the towns tourism and retail offer.

With visits to friends and relatives, and the influence that local people can have on visitors from beyond Lewes, there is an argument that meeting the needs of local communities has an indirect benefit in growing tourism. However there are legitimate questions whether the information needs of the local community is the best use of 'tourism' funding.

A tourism (TIC) service can also be an important piece of the local visitor economy jigsaw, helping bring the wider business community together through events and networking, communications and newsletters either on its own or in partnership with others (e.g. Lewes Chamber).

LEWES TIC

Lewes TIC has operated out of 187 High Street for over a decade until May 2024, when it was temporarily relocated to 6 High Street (in shared council offices) while urgent planned structural works took place.

187 High Street – former premises (until May 2024)

187 High Street is a highly visible corner location at the junction of High Street and Fisher Street, opposite Station Street. Bus services and through routes pass this location. It is a 5-minute uphill walk from Lewes Station. It has large windows which allow for displays for events and organisations in Lewes.

The interior has a large area for leaflets, maps, displays and a modern counter area for the TIC staff. There is extensive brochure racking and storage in the rooms behind the TIC as well as essential staff services (toilets, kitchen etc)

Opening hours at this location were: Monday – Friday 9.30-4.30; Saturdays 10.00-3.00, Bank Holidays 10.00-3.00. In previous years Sunday openings had occurred but this ended due to a lack of demand. The operation was delivered by 2 members of staff, plus some lunch cover.



TIC staff suggest footfall, in the lead up to the move, averaged about 150 visits each day. This was greater in the summer months and in the build-up to big events such as Bonfire. Footfall data for 2023/24 shows 57,000 visitors via the door counter (around 190/day) with around 8,000 making further enquiries (largely in person at the TIC counter). The majority therefore are self-service, collecting maps, leaflets etc without any need to engage further with staff.

These numbers are lower than pre-covid years when 76,000 came through the TIC and 14,400 enquiries were handled by staff in 2018/19 and 80,000 visited with 16,000 enquiries handled in 2017/18.

The range of services delivered in this location were:

1. Tourists/Visitors

- Tourist/visitor information
- Wide range of leaflets/maps suitable for tourists, families, walkers, art lovers, local residents, Airbnb hosts, local businesses etc
- Information about 'what's on' – forthcoming concerts, exhibitions, talks etc
- Availability of bus timetables
- Maintain lists of accommodation, eateries, shops, pubs, tour guides, bus services, taxi numbers, venues for hire etc
- Visit Lewes website

2. Sales

- Sale of rail tickets
- Items for sale – books, maps, postcards, greetings cards, souvenirs e.g. tea towels, keyrings, mugs, posters maps, fridge magnets, coasters stamps, water bottles, tote bags
- Promotion of local events/community information – window displays, posters (A3 and A4), flyers, sale of tickets, promotion on VL website and social media + selling tickets
- Sale of tickets for Lewes Bonfire and Love Supreme
- Payment by cash or card. Phone sales had been suspended.

3. Community

- Provision of food waste bags
- Local publications – The Lewesian, Lewes News, Newhaven Matters, Seaford Scene
- Christmas shopping trail with hamper promotion
- Promotion of LDC events, e.g. Artwave, Walk this Way, Gin & Fizz, Brewhaven

6 High Street – current premises (May 2024 until present)

When work commenced at 187 High Street, the service moved to a temporary location as part of a shared office with Council services at 6 High St.

The window graphics highlight this is the location for tourist information, but the signage mainly points towards the wider services of Lewes District Council.

A TIC desk is provided to the right of the entrance and a small leaflet display space is available on the left of the main entrance. These are limited in space and therefore restrict the volume of information and literature that is available to visitors.

Staffing in this location is one member of staff (plus lunch cover) and lone working is not a problem given the presence of staff at the main council office and reception desk.

It is harder for visitors to locate this venue as the majority of signage (finger posts and brown/white signs) still point to the old location at 187 High St. A display on the window of 187 High Street re-directs to 6 High Street albeit, signage is a temporary issue regardless of location.

Opening hours at this location match the main council office (Monday to Friday 09.00 – 17.00) and are closed on weekends and bank holidays which means the service is usually not available when visitors are likely to be prevalent.

Visitor numbers in this location are reduced. Staff estimate approximately 30-50 attend per day. Enquiry sheets which register TIC visitors show just under 7000 people using the services between June 2024 – Nov 2024, with 1785 enquiring at the counter/desk. This works out at about 54 visitors/day – much lower than the 190/day who visited 187.



The range of services delivered in this location are:

1. Tourists/Visitors

- Maintain lists of accommodation, eateries, shops, pubs etc
- Restricted range of leaflets/maps due to lack of space – external paid storage unit
- Information about ‘what’s on’ – forthcoming concerts, exhibitions, talks etc – limited to flyers on front of desk – no posters, window displays

2. Sales

- No room for sales merchandise - limited to fridge magnets, one display carousel for cards/maps
- No books for sale – no opportunity for recent publications produced by local authors
- Card only, no cash sales

3. Community

- Provision of bus timetables
- Sale of rail tickets
- Visit Lewes website
- Promotion of LDC events, via website and flyers – very restricted space
- Local publications – The Lewesian, Lewes News, Newhaven Matters, Seaford Scene
- Sale of tickets for Lewes Bonfire and Love Supreme
- Provision of food waste bags

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS

Sentiment Analysis of Lewes TIC (based on 58 Trip Advisor reviews) in terms of overall compliments and complaints is shown below. This covers a period when both locations were used as a TIC so cannot be used to reach views on one location or another except where that makes sense (e.g. location at top of a hill refers to 187):

Compliments	Complaints
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Open• Helpful, friendly, knowledgeable staff• Directions• Explanation of Attractions• Well-stocked• Centrally located• Souvenirs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Top of a hill (2019)• Accessibility concerns (citing hill)• Amount of directional signage from the train station

This highlights the merits and value in a TIC and how well regarded it is but also issues of access, in part due to the geography of Lewes.

OTHER VISITOR SERVICES & BUDGETS

Lewes District Council tourism department also maintains a website <https://www.visitlewes.co.uk> and a presence across major social media platforms such as [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [X](#).

Lewes TIC has a budget of approximately £92,000 which is largely allocated to staffing costs. Contributions from retail are relatively small. In 187 High Street, sales averaged £25,000. In the current location sales are forecast at £7,500..

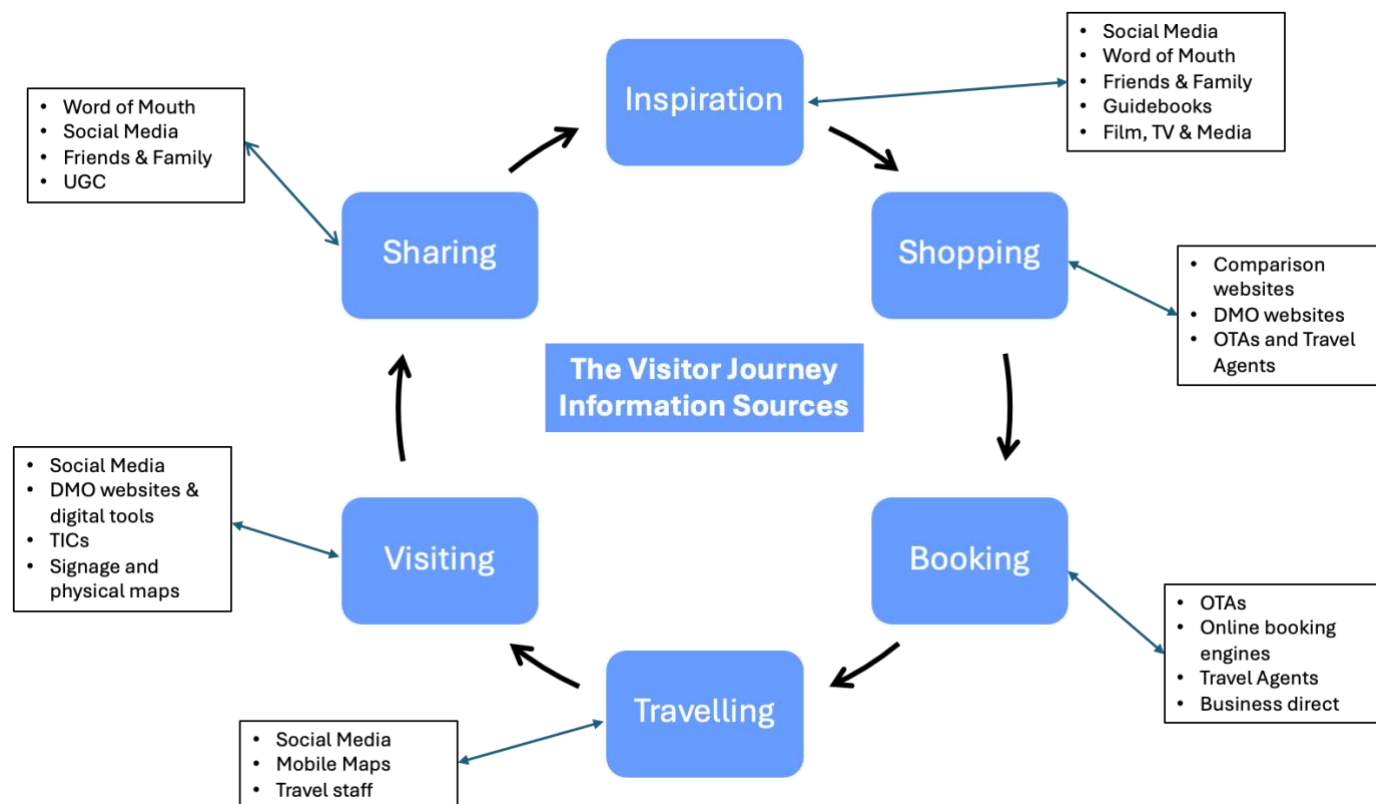
As well as the official Visit Lewes services, other commercial businesses such as [Windrush Maps](#) for example publish and distribute town maps, supported by business advertising.

Businesses are not required to be members of Visit Lewes – the services and access to channels are largely free. Business engagement activity is not delivered by Visit Lewes due to a lack of funding, with most of this occurring at other organisations networking events such as Lewes Chamber.

2. VISITOR & MARKET DRIVERS

THE VISITOR JOURNEY

A TIC while important, mainly supports visitors while they are 'in-destination' as illustrated in the figure shown here. Most destinations need to think about how they are delivering services at every stage of the Visitor Journey and how this aligns with their primary objectives. Some will decide to put more emphasis into inspiration to attract new visitors, while others will rely on others to do that and may focus on ensuring the visitors they are receiving have a great experience while in the destination. A TIC can be a very valuable tool to ensure visitors have a great experience but is unlikely to result in attracting more visitors except as a result of positive word of mouth.



Visit Lewes operates services across a number of these stages with a website and social media content.

SUSSEX CONTEXT

The East Sussex, Brighton & Hove and West Sussex Local Visitor Economy Partnership is the partnership body for the region that has been awarded official 'LVEP' status by VisitEngland and seeks to work collaboratively with local destinations throughout Sussex.

The recently launched Strategy for Growth 2024-2034 has an underlying ambition to grow the value of the visitor economy by £2.5bn to £7.5bn by 2034. The vision is *'Sussex is a thriving, vibrant and regenerative visitor destination blending contemporary culture and local hospitality against a stunning backdrop of natural and built heritage. The principles of partnership, collaboration, inclusivity, and sustainability are deeply ingrained in our businesses, destination management, marketing and development. Sussex consistently offers exceptional visitor experiences for first time and returning domestic and international visitors. The stories and personality of Sussex shine through and position Sussex as a competitively distinct UK destination.'*

While the strategy makes no specific recommendations with regard Tourist Information Centre, there are a number of priorities and actions which a local TIC can support. This includes:

- ▶ Incredible Experiences: Encouraging visitors to use sustainable transport; development of the visitor experience.
- ▶ Positive Impact: Amplifying the offer through consistent messaging; development of itineraries.
- ▶ Developing Innovation, Productivity, Accessibility & Sustainability: Advocacy and certification; champion local products; provide and disseminate training to tourism businesses

By fulfilling a role as information centre to visitors and local communities, and by becoming the focus for networking local tourism businesses, the TIC can support these pan-Sussex objectives and elevate the competitiveness of the local Lewes offer to visitors.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

In-person tourist information centres are closing across Britain ([The Telegraph, 2024](#)) due to low ROI, budget constraints, and a shift in consumer travel planning to digital platforms. Specific examples of recent closure announcements include:

- ▶ **VisitScotland** announced their two-year plan to close 25 information centres by 2026 (BBC, 2024) to narrow in on a “digital first” strategy of attracting visitors (see [here](#)). VisitScotland chairman Lord Thurso said, ““The demand for iCentres has reduced while the demand for online information and booking has continued to grow.” Critics, including the UK Minister for Scotland, John Lamont, said the closures would be a “blow to our towns” and a disservice to the elderly. A seasonal TIC worker in Aberdeen stated, “Scotland is renowned as a welcoming country, and we are the face of that. It’s something you just cannot get online” (Telegraph, 2024).
- ▶ The **Windsor** Museum and tourist information centre closed in 2024 to cut costs as the DMO cited “weak and serious” financial stability. The closure received heavy backlash (The Observer, 2024). See [here](#).
- ▶ **Norwich’s** TIC closed during the pandemic and made the choice in 2021 to not reopen. The DMO cited the increase in the city’s tourist traffic coupled with the dramatic *drop* of footfall within the TIC; In-person visits to the tourist information centre have been falling for many years, with 2019 showing a 50% reduction from 2012. This is against rising visitor numbers to the city, from 6.9 million in 2012 to 13.1 million by 2019. See [here](#).
- ▶ The Telegraph (2024) reported the closure of the following centres: **Norwich (see above), Morecambe, Lancaster, Winchcombe, Chesterfield, Totnes, Medway, Caerphilly, and Centre for Alternative Technology (Corris)**. The Telegraph also reported that the Peak District’s quartet of visitor centres in Bakewell (see p. 10), Castleton, Edale, and the Upper Derwent Valley were under threat of closure if a charity had not stepped in to provide three years of emergency funding before a more permanent solution could be found.
- ▶ Tourism Southeast (TSE), whose contract with Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC) will close the **Romsey** Visitor Information Centre on Church Street at the end of March. TSE cited an independent review of tourism in Test Valley, which highlighted that tourism and customer behaviours are changing and more people are planning visits online ([Hampshire Chronicle](#)).
- ▶ North Norfolk Council unanimously voted to close the “expensive” Cromer TIC (BBC, 2025). Read [here](#).
- ▶ Medway Council ended its service in Rochester High Street permanently in April 2024 (BBC, 2024). Read [here](#).
- ▶ The Cotswolds Tourist Information Centres (Bourton-on-the-Water, Chipping Campden, Stow-on-the-Wold, and Tetbury) are under threat of being closed (BBC, 2023). Read [here](#).

In order to understand what the situation is in reputable and high performing market towns we looked at those that appeared in relevant articles to understand what was happening with regards TICs. The approach we took was:

- ▶ **Step 1: Comprehensive Market Town Index and Scoring.** We collected a comprehensive list of all 379 market towns in England and used three reputable magazine articles with titles such as “The 20 Top Market Towns in England” to cross-check against the comprehensive list. Each town was given a score for number of mentions (1 = mentioned by one article, 2 mentioned by two articles, etc.). The highest score possible was four, which included the comprehensive list as a mention. Some towns mentioned by journalists were not included in the original list, such as Altrincham in Cheshire. We only researched the towns with a score of 3 or 4, for a total of 13 towns from the longlist.
- ▶ **Step 2: Research on the 13 Finalist Towns and Final Selection of Best Practices.** We collected the following data for each of the 13 finalist towns:
 - Population (2021)
 - TIC Title
 - TIC Location (free-standing building, shared space, no physical space, etc.)
 - Days and Hours Open
 - Website Ownership (Own website ex: Sevenoaks, Kent versus regional site Sherbourne, Dorset under Visit Dorset)
 - Website Score (Poor, Decent, Strong)
 - Contextual Notes (including but not limited to tourist attractions, if the centre closed, excellent video footage on the TIC, etc.)

The 13 towns and their TICs reviewed are:

Town	County	Notes/lessons
Ashbourne	Derbyshire	• Incorporated into Visit Peak District and Derbyshire.
Bakewell	Derbyshire	• Incorporated into Visit Peak District and Derbyshire.
Sherborne	Dorset	• NA – Now Closed
Ditchling	East Sussex	• NA – Website Only
Stow-on-the-Wold	Gloucestershire	• NA – Website is Down

Cranbrook	Kent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NA – Website Only
Sevenoaks	Kent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NA – Typical TIC, not considered best practice
Stamford	Lincolnshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new Tourist Information and Community Hub will be housed inside St John's Church, Stamford. Great use of historic building. • On regional website of Visit Lincolnshire. • Currently in a partnership with a charity: Stamford Arts Centre. See here. • Use volunteers on a regional basis, some work with the RSPB. See here.
Skipton	North Yorkshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See best practice section
Alnwick	Northumberland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NA – Not Advertised
Ludlow	Shropshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NA - Typical TIC, not considered best practice
Framlingham	Suffolk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NA – Website Only, had a terrific YouTube video on the home page that captures the value proposition. See here.
Devizes	Wiltshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NA - Typical TIC, not considered best practice

Out of the 13 towns, we found:

- Websites: 5 regional hosts, 7 owned
- Open Daily: 2 (Devizes and Bakewell)
- Open Monday-Saturday, closed Sunday: 4
- Open Monday-Friday: 1
- Open Wednesday, Friday, Saturday: 1
- Opening Hours non-applicable due to closing/lack of TIC or not posted: 5

- Average Population: 10,094 (based on Lewes' city centre population of approximately 17,000)
- Located in a Historic Building/Church/Museum: 3
- Free-Standing TIC: 2
- Shared with Town Hall/Council Offices: 3

We also found that Sherbourne Tourist Information Centre is now closed. An information point with local attraction leaflets can be found at Sherborne Museum, on Visit Dorset's site. Visit Ditching, Framlington, and Cranbrook have no TIC with a website-only presence.

We then augmented the market town list by completing the above data collection for heritage-based cities in the UK, such as Bath and Cambridge.

In addition to the 13 towns, we reviewed 6 UK cities:

City	County	Notes / Lessons Learned
Bath	Somerset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the Bath World Heritage app that uses geolocation and augmented reality gamification. • Uses volunteers aged 18+ in 3-hour shifts. Training and uniform provided. • Has a variety of local partnerships to produce community art events for families. Partners include Roman Baths, Fashion Museum, Victoria Art Gallery and Bath Record Office. • Marketing centred around UNESCO World Heritage status.
Exeter	Devon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exeter has a series of mobile Visitor Information Points (VIPs) throughout the city with tourist info and maps at the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ John Lewis (upstairs by café and toilets) ○ Exeter Library ○ Exeter Tickets (Fore Street) ○ RAMM ○ Exeter Cathedral

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has an excellent magazine produced twice a year for visitors, arguably better than a leaflet. Read here. Has an app available for download with colour-coded attractions and geolocation features. Does not use volunteers.
Cambridge	Cambridgeshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers tours for £25/adult and £15/child. Advertises partners on their site. <div> <p>Our Partners</p>  </div>
York	North Yorkshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team consists of “seasoned tourism experts and dedicated volunteers.” Offers 30 attractions on the Visit York pass. See here.
Canterbury	Kent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interestingly sits within a museum The Beany. Museum uses volunteers but the visitor information centre does <i>not</i>.
Norwich	Norfolk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closed in 2021. NA.

Out of these 6 cities:

- Average population: 158,493
- Free-standing building: 3
- Inside a historic building/museum: 2
- Closed: 1 (Visit Norwich moved to online only)
- Open Daily: 5/5 (Note: Exeter is only open Thurs-Sun on off-peak months of November-March)

3.COMMUNITY & BUSINESS DRIVERS

CONSULTATION FINDINGS

In-depth interviews were held with 10 local business and community stakeholders and summary findings are as follows:

Decisions about the TIC should be based on what you are wanting to achieve. Many consultees indicated strong support for a TIC but reasons why this was the case were mixed. Most suggested it was about 'visitor welcome', others about 'supporting local businesses'. There was a view that having a TIC (or not) was an indication of wider town centre health and the sort of thing that a successful market town should have. Some felt that if the objective was to generate more visitors, the investment in a TIC might be better used on marketing and campaigns to attract visitors. And there was a recognition that resources were finite and not everything the town might want can be funded. There was a recognition that digital and mobile devices were increasingly important in providing tourist information but that 1:1 information and welcome was important, especially given the demographic of Lewes visitors.

The TIC is important and should be retained. Overall, the majority of consultees were supportive of retaining a TIC in Lewes, while recognising this might limit any investment in marketing. The weight and strength of local community feeling about the TIC and its temporary move from 187 to 6 High Street are an indication of the strength of feeling about this. Some views were that Lewes District Council had been felt to have divested of assets in Lewes and the TIC was the latest to be under threat. This cumulative impact was perhaps why so many businesses and locals were resistant to any change to the status quo.

There are mixed views on which location is best. Comparisons between No. 6 and No. 187 High Street were expressed as a reason to return to 187 even though it is like comparing 'apples and pears' in terms of the type of services available and the nature of the offer.

No. 6 High Street. This was felt to be in a high traffic area, with level and easy access from the railway station and many of the town's car parks. It connected well to Cliffe and the many eateries and antique shops. However, the current location was felt to be lacking in visual impact, a lack of space for TIC services including window displays, a temporary feel and with audiences with very different needs (Council v Visitor).

Southover House (Charleston in Lewes). This location has easy access from the Railway Station and is already attracting visitors to Lewes and a TIC located here could be used to get visitors to remain 'sticky' in the destination, stay longer and explore more widely. However, it was felt that the location lacked passing footfall for visitors or residents and the perceived lack of neutrality here could undermine wider business support.

Lewes Castle. While seen as the main attraction in Lewes and one which already receives lots of visitors, many of whom are older and are likely to need the services of a TIC, it was seen as less accessible than other locations, requiring visitors to have reached the 'top of the town' and therefore not working as well for new arrivals. It was also felt that the absence of window display space and more limited footfall limited the potential of this location.

187 High Street. Overall, this was felt to be the best location for the TIC. While much of this was about familiarity with the location, other advantages were felt to be existing shop-fittings, existing town signage, space for leaflets and window displays, leaflet storage and racking space. Passing footfall and buses and the 'cross-roads' location meant most consultees viewed this as an area which was most suitable for visitors and residents. It was seen as a location which pulled visitors further up to the 'top of the town' although a downside was the steep climb up from the railways station for older visitors. Questions about whether this would limit or inhibit the marketing and lease of office space on the upper floors or be used as a possible 'reception' desk for the offices alongside delivering TIC services were mixed.

No. 2 Fisher Street. With its own entrance and windows out onto Fisher Street this location had some of the same advantages as 187 High St. although Fisher Street was felt to be less visible and with less footfall. While this had been suggested as a possible TIC location to free up 187 for marketing as a commercial let, it was questioned whether use of this space could provide the ground floor reception for any office lettings above, rather than via 187. It was also felt that this would be less accessible as a TIC with narrow pavements and limited interior space.

Re-setting the role of the TIC. Decisions about the TIC and its location were felt to be an opportunity to re-shape the TIC services. Consultees expressed a view that any TIC should strongly tell the story of the place – helping visitors (and locals) uncover the unique, contemporary and hidden experiences alongside those that are more obvious. Lewes was felt to be a town without a single stand-out attraction and instead a place which has a breadth of experiences. The TIC therefore has an important role to communicate that widespread offer. One consultee suggested the TIC is a great place to find out about stuff that is happening below the 'google threshold'. Others felt the TIC should do more to encourage visitors to spend longer in the town with a range of itineraries and other tools and there was a feeling that Lewes was quite a hard town to navigate if you hadn't visited before. Other views were that the TIC and tourism services should be doing everything possible to encourage visitors to travel sustainably to Lewes and in particular make use of Rail and Bus to visit. There were views that the TIC should be able to be open on days when visitors are most prevalent and therefore should be available on Saturday. There is some debate as to whether it should be open on Sunday but there are likely to be more visitors on a Sunday than say a Tuesday.

A need to maximise commercial income in the TIC. Consultees recognised the need for the TIC to maximise income but most suggestions in terms of ticket sales, charges for window displays and retail are unlikely to make a significant dent in the cost of delivering the TIC service. Nonetheless, it was felt that every effort should be made to maximise income. While operating a café was seen as a business which works well in some other TICs or visitor centres, most spaces being considered in Lewes would not be able to accommodate this and it was also felt that Lewes had enough cafes that the TIC should support rather than create a new one.

A sub-regional role. While most consultees were concerned about Lewes town, there was a recognition that the Lewes TIC could and should promote more of what the wider district has to offer and the advantage of this was that visitors would be persuaded to spend longer in the area with Lewes Town getting more benefits from overnight stays. Unlocking the potential from the burgeoning Sussex viticulture offer was felt to be an example of one way in which the TIC could do something unique for visitors and businesses and which would complement the town offer.

The TIC should be the glue for the wider visitor economy. Most consultees expressed a view that a well run TIC should be the glue that unites the local visitor economy. While it offers an opportunity to promote business it should also be used as a vehicle to bring those different businesses together for networking and business support. Given the role of Lewes Chamber it was thought this was something that should be done in partnership with the Chamber. It was also recognised that there are other existing or potential visitor touchpoints in Lewes (e.g. Railway Station, The Depot, Charleston in Lewes, Lewes Castle) where visitors might have their first contact with someone and where they might want to get hold of a map or get basic information, and the TIC should support these other Tourist Information Points with support, maps and relevant literature.

4. BEST PRACTICE

There are a number of examples of sustainable TIC services across the country. Common lessons that emerge from these examples (and others) are:

- ▶ Great TICs help tell the stories of the area in interactive or static displays and provide a strong sense of place
- ▶ They provide a brilliant welcome using a combination of paid staff and volunteers
- ▶ They are located close to or easily accessible from where visitors arrive in the destination
- ▶ They signpost and help visitors uncover independent businesses and unique experiences
- ▶ They can work well as part of a shared service (with Council, National Parks or attractions)
- ▶ They provide the services visitors need including tickets, bookings etc
- ▶ They are not a replacement for technological and digital solutions but can be used to enhance the take up of websites, apps etc.

SKIPTON VISITOR CENTRE, NORTH YORKSHIRE

Location: Skipton Town Hall

Reason for Best Practice: Interactive virtual displays, shared space with council reception (good use of small space, that could be applicable to Lewes)

Open: Monday to Saturday, 9.30 AM - 4.30 PM

Population (2021): 15,042

Website: [Welcome to Skipton](#)



BAKEWELL VISITOR CENTRE, DERBYSHIRE

Location: Old Market Hall

Reason for Best Practice: Host of high-quality offerings beyond information including retail and a local photo gallery: Peak District Photography Gallery

Open: Daily, 10.00 AM – 4:30 PM

Population (2021): 3,499

Website: [Visit Peak District](#)

**BATH WORLD HERITAGE CENTRE, SOMERSET**

Location: Central Bath next to the Roman Baths World Heritage Site

Reason for Best Practice: World-class museum facilities, including the Bath World Heritage App. At the Bath World Heritage Centre, you can:

- Discover what makes Bath such a unique place
- Find out more about the city's attributes of Outstanding Universal Value: the hot springs, Roman remains, Georgian architecture, Georgian town planning, the social setting of the Georgian spa town, and the city's natural landscape setting
- Meet the Bath World Heritage Centre staff and volunteers who will give you more information on the amazing history and heritage of Bath.

Open: Daily, 10 AM – 5 PM

Population: 94,092

Website: [Bath World Heritage](#)

The link to the Bath YouTube video can be found [here](#).



SHERWOOD FOREST, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Location: Stand Alone Building

Reason for Best Practice: *Excellent example of commercialisation for economic vitality; beyond information offers, a cafe, a gift shop, and unique concepts, such as backpack hire. Strong example of place branding with Robin Hood focus. Links to the RSPB charity online gift shop for another means of revenue stream.

Website: [Visit Sherwood](#)

*Note: Like most national parks, Sherwood has more space to create opportunities for commercialisation. So, not all examples would be feasible for Lewes.



5.SITE OPTIONS

A handful of potential sites have been considered as part of this study. They include 187 High St, 6 High St, 2 Fisher Street as well as the potential for shared services at Southover House, Lewes Town Hall and Lewes Castle.

There is further detailed work to be done on developing the business case for preferred options. However we have developed criteria to support the review of different options. We also ran a workshop with a small group of key stakeholders including Town and District Councillors and the Chamber to look in greater detail at these different sites.

CRITERIA

The criteria which have been developed to support the appraisal of options are:

- ▶ **Strategic Fit:** How well does the option help Lewes grow visitor numbers, visitor spend and deliver outstanding visitor welcome?
- ▶ **Footfall:** How many visitors and residents pass by, or close, to the option? Is the option well placed to influence visitors early on in their visit?
- ▶ **Running Costs:** How costly is the service to run in this location in terms of staff, services? Are there any loss opportunity costs if an option is used for the TIC instead of let commercially?
- ▶ **Income Generation:** Does this location lend itself to income generation and to what extent can this meet the costs of the service?
- ▶ **Ease of Set-Up:** How easy is this option to set-up including any capital costs (shopfitting, signage etc) plus complexity of any contractual arrangements (e.g. SLAs or leases)?
- ▶ **Risks:** How risky is this option (financial, reputational , operational, legal)?
- ▶ **Legacy:** How sustainable is this option for the medium to longer term given pressures on public finances?

WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

The mini-workshop with stakeholders was helpful in getting a better insight into the challenges and opportunities of different site options.

- ▶ 187 High Street came across as strongly supported with a view that it was in a good location and relatively low risk. However the financial implications of this site would likely require two members of staff and may restrict the council from letting the space commercially.
- ▶ 6 High St was not seen as suitable given the different audiences expected to use the space, limited space for the TIC needs and a recognition of a reputational risk given the strong feelings among the local community. There was an acknowledgment that this location is not bad for visitors with good footfall and level access from the station, but investment and re-configuring would be needed for it to work.
- ▶ 2 Fisher Street was felt to lack visibility for visitors and there were strong concerns about accessibility and safety with the road. The space constraint and costs required to establish it were seen as negatives, although it would be relatively quick and easy to establish as it is in LDCs ownership.
- ▶ Southover House was seen as a very good option. While the location sees less passing footfall it already has a large number of Lewes visitors and is close to the station. The running costs could be lower than 187 and there is space and potential for displays and income generation. Any agreement and SLA would take time to agree but with the 25-year lease agreed, there is the potential to put in place an option that can weather the storms likely to be felt by the public sector.
- ▶ Likewise Lewes Town Hall and The Castle both have merit. A shared service could help both organisations keep costs low, while meeting the needs of visitors (and residents). The time taken to work out a model and SLA is one drawback.

One issue which makes these choices difficult comes from the perceived purpose of the TIC. It is clear that Lewes TIC has become a valuable community asset reflected in the high response rate to the survey by residents. But the TIC should primarily be a facility that meets the needs of visitors. If Lewes residents and businesses want to see their economy grow from improved visitor spending then there may be a need to compromise on TIC location in order that investment can be directed to other activity which will have a bigger impact in terms of business generated, such as marketing.

LOCATION REVIEW

As part of this review we have looked at a number of possible locations for the TIC which were identified at the start of the project. There are reasons why a number of these can be discounted at this point. But further work is required to explore the potential from others. The preferred option is dependent on the willingness of potential partners and the terms of any agreement/SLA.

The pros and cons of each location, identified through consultation, engagement and the survey, are highlighted in the table below:

PROS	CONS
187 High Street	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No shopfitting required (already in place) • Town signage largely already directs to this location • Familiarity from businesses, residents and repeat visitors • High traffic location/footfall • Large windows for displays • Central location – well placed to draw visitors to top of the town 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top of a hill (from the Station/Cliffe) • Limits potential to let the premises for commercial income • Requires 2 x members of staff
Southover House (Charleston in Lewes)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close to the train station • Already receiving large numbers of visitors • Long term commitment to this location by Charleston through 25-year lease – potential for sustainable service • Pulls visitors towards attractions such as Southover Grange, Anne of Cleve's House, the Dripping Pan which may otherwise be overlooked • May only require 1 x member of staff (shared service) • Weekend operation good for visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception that service here may lack impartiality in directing visitors across the destination • Town centre signage will require updating • Additional shopfitting costs • Requires updating of town signage
6 High Street	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High levels of footfall (especially for residents) • Level access from the station • Close to bus stops • Close to eateries, brewery, many of the antique shops • Only requires 1 x member of staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard to overcome views that this location has not worked well for the TIC • Clash of users with visitors and local residents wanting very different services here • Surrounding businesses mainly 'universal brands' rather than 'Lewes independents' • Requires updating of town signage

2 Fisher Street	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LDC owned – so easy to agree • Central location • Retain document storage from 187 • Town signage directs to this area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower visibility than other options • Concerns about accessibility and narrowness of pavement/road traffic • Shopfitting costs • Relatively small space • Would probably require 2 x members of staff
Lewes Castle/Barbican House	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May only require 1 member of staff (shared service) • Weekend operation good for visitors • Established visitor profile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception that service here may lack impartiality in directing visitors across the destination • Additional shopfitting • Complexity of working out partnership/SLA arrangements • Top of the town – not central
Lewes Town Hall	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic building recognisable to locals and visitors • Central location with high footfall • Town signage directs to this area • May only require 1 member of staff (shared service) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shopfitting required • Lack of availability at weekends

While there is the option to return to 187, it is very likely that the pressure on public finances and the costs of delivering the services would mean this may only be a short-term solution with a need to revisit the decision within a few years.

Finding a new partnership arrangement with either the Town Council, Charleston Lewes or Sussex Archaeological Society (Sussex Past) might be the most sustainable solution in the medium to longer term. Of these, Charleston Lewes (Southover House) and Lewes Town Council seem to offer the best opportunities.

Next steps are for LDC to engage in discussions with Lewes Town Council and Charleston to develop the options, a clear business case and costs.

6. ALTERNATIVE USE OF FUNDING

The cost of running the Tourist Information Centre equates to a third of the available budget ringfenced by Lewes District Council for the provision of encouraging tourism to the district. Throughout the survey and the baseline research, particularly with regards to the national context (such as VisitScotland closing their TICs) and changing visitor behaviours, it has become clear that:

- ▶ The TIC in Lewes town is mainly servicing residents as opposed to tourists
- ▶ The tourists that are arriving at the TIC have already chosen Lewes as their holiday destination
- ▶ Tourists to the town are crucial to the success of many of the businesses and therefore encouraging more visitors will be more beneficial to the economy

With that in mind, consideration should be given to alternative uses of the funding that is currently used to support the TIC to see if there are different ways to increase the number of tourists coming in. Naturally these are largely marketing initiatives and could include:

- ▶ International press engagement: showcasing the district at renowned trade fairs, particularly those aimed at operators and coach companies to show them that Lewes District is the place to visit
- ▶ Online marketing: the survey showed that 73% of visitors used online search platforms and other websites such as Tripadvisor, Experience Sussex and Sussex Top Attraction when researching where they wanted to go. Investing some of the money previously used for the TIC into advertising with some of these online platforms would place Lewes district on the map for those seeking their next trip.
- ▶ Local and regional marketing: Investing into collaborative campaigns with the likes of Experience Sussex to showcase Lewes as a destination within the wider region, rich in heritage and culture, and reach a wider audience.

7. LEWES TIC RECOMMENDATIONS

While there is a strongly accepted view that Lewes would continue to benefit from a TIC, the future model for delivery should look to deliver strong outcomes at the lowest cost. With that in mind, recommendation to achieve this are:

1. Influence and surprise visitors:

Lead with stories. The TIC should help tell the story of Lewes and move from reactively responding to visitor enquiries to suggesting itineraries and experiences that keep visitors here for longer. Walking tours, routes, maps and guides should help visitors get ‘under the skin’ of Lewes and reinforce the stories that characterise the town (historic and contemporary). New arrangements might present an opportunity to align to wider Sussex ambitions to identify a Sussex Wines Information Hub.

A quality TIC. Designing a TIC which is visually appealing, with integrated audio-visual displays, exhibitions and which uses technology to help visitors explore the town. The TIC should be the hub for visitor wayfinding helping visitors navigate the town. It is acknowledged that funds are not available for a full re-fit.



2. Deliver in partnership and using volunteers:

Explore partnership opportunities to keep costs down. In retaining a standalone TIC in its own premises, managed and run by Lewes District Council, the staffing costs are likely to remain unchanged. These account for the majority of the available council funding ringfenced to encouraging tourism to the district. Consideration should be given to partnership with other relevant organisations so that staffing levels can be shared between the partner organisations, avoiding concerns of lone working. If payroll costs can be reduced, the service can invest in marketing, in line with what research has shown other destinations are doing, to reach potential visitors at the point of booking and deliver savings to the local authority.



A sustainable TIC. Partnership with another organisation is a shared commitment to the service which prevents ‘death by a thousand cuts’ as a result of annual budget savings rounds.

Delivered in-house or through an SLA. The partnership arrangements might continue to be run by Lewes DC alongside a partner or could be delivered by the partner organisation with a commitment from LDC to fund a post in the host organisation. The exact details are dependent on the partner and location. Further consideration to this model should be explored with Lewes Town Council (Town Hall), Charleston in Lewes and Sussex Past (Lewes Castle).

Make better use of volunteers. In other parts of the UK, TICs are making increasing use of volunteers to deliver services which would otherwise not be provided. This might be to extend opening hours, provide cover, and support visitor welcome at points of arrival. Given the strength of feeling in the local community evidenced through the survey response and the desire to see the TIC service retained, Lewes DC should consider whether the new TIC can make better use of volunteers to deliver and enhance services at a reduced cost.



3. Make the TIC the hub.

Placemaking. Think about where visitors arrive (rail, bus, car) and provide access to information (maps, guides, signs). Consider the creation of formal ‘**Tourist Information Points**’ at various locations (Station, Charleston in Lewes, Lewes Castle) and provide support to these organisations to meet basic tourist needs while providing them with an opportunity to refer visitors to the main TIC for more complex enquiries.

Support business networks. The TIC should also offer businesses the opportunity to promote their services to visitors and should be a glue which connects the visitor economy businesses with each other as well as the council and regional partners (e.g. LVEP).



4. Commercialise (as far as possible)

Maximise earned income. It is hard to grow income significantly in a TIC. Recent income from retail, window displays, ticket and travel commissions are typical of the sorts of income which most TICs will generate. Highly interactive AV displays in high footfall TICs can be used to advertise local businesses but even with high quality tools and channels it is important to be realistic about the commercial income potential from a TIC. With 100,000 visitors to a TIC, retail sales of £50-80k would represent a significant uplift from current operations.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the survey results that there is still a demand for a TIC in Lewes and the preferred location option in the eyes of residents and businesses is 187 High St due mainly to familiarity, footfall and large windows for displays. However, consideration should be given to the fact that the purpose of Tourism funding is to encourage tourists to the district.

Visitors themselves are less concerned about the value of the TIC in encouraging them to visit. Most expressed little interest in the location of the TIC or simply fed back that it should be located close to transport links and provide the essential services such as accessing leaflets, maps, timetables and tickets.

Lewes District Council would therefore be best placed to further explore options for a TIC service that is cheaper to operate. The likely solution being found by working collaboratively with other venues to share the space, and/or utilising volunteers to significantly reduce the cost of the service.

Being able to reduce the cost of the service means the TIC can remain, but the Tourism department of the council can repurpose funds towards reaching prospective visitors by other means. Times have changed and holidaymakers are relying more so than ever on digital resources to research and select their next holiday destination. Lewes District Council is currently unable to reach new markets as funds are spent on the TIC. A new hybrid approach is an opportunity to achieve both outcomes of a new TIC for Lewes and funds to support marketing.

8. APPENDIX – SURVEY FINDINGS

VISITOR SURVEY

109 visitors responded to this survey, and what follows are the results by question.

Key differences between the visitors' and residents' responses:

There are some notable differences between the responses from visitors and residents.

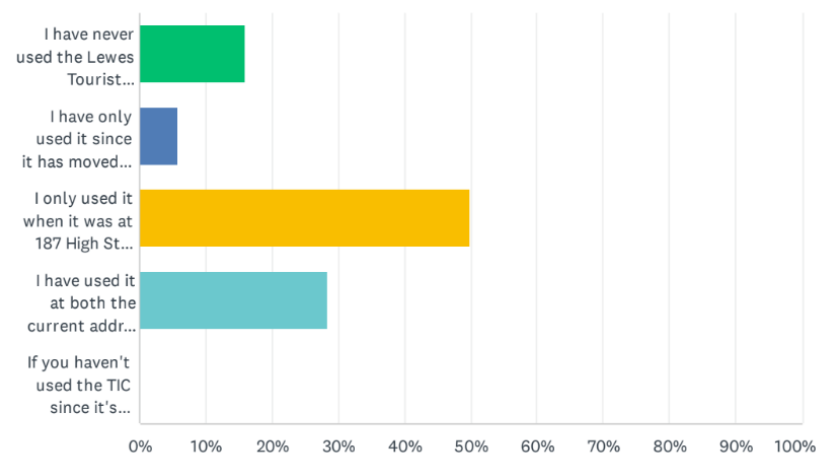
- ▶ In arguments for returning to 187 High St, residents cited nostalgia and community impact where visitors did not.
- ▶ Since the move to 6 High St, 1/3 of visitors use the TIC the same amount while only 14% of residents use the TIC the same amount.
- ▶ On their last occasion at the TIC, visitors show a significantly higher tendency to pick up local publications, souvenirs and travel information while residents used the TIC more for community waste bags and event tickets.
- ▶ The residents expressed more dissatisfaction with hours open and items for sale than visitors.
- ▶ Residents used Lewes What's On (81%) more than visitors (60%). However, visitors used TripAdvisor and Sussex Top Attractions more.
- ▶ Residents cared more about having the TIC open on Saturdays (85% to 66%) and Sundays (45% to 34%)

The summary of responses to each of the questions follows:

In which locations have you used the Lewes Tourist Information Service?

Answered: 106

Most of the visitors (50%) only used it when it was at 187 High St (before May 2024), followed by 28% who have used the TIC at both addresses.



If you haven't used the TIC since it's temporary move to 6 High St. (May 24), can you tell us why?

Answered: 47

Here is a summary of the responses, organised by category:

1. Location and Accessibility Issues:

- Relocation Awareness: Some were unaware of the relocation or thought the TIC has closed entirely.
- Accessibility and Convenience: the new location is perceived as "out of the way," and less prominent
- Comparison to Previous Location: previous location was considered more convenient, especially for visitors arriving via train

2. Service and Facility Concerns:

- Reduced Services and Stock: noted a significant reduction in displayed information, leaflets, tickets, cards, and local gift offers
- Appearance and Appeal: the new location is described as "uninspiring," and "less inviting"
- Opening Hours: It was closed or reduced opening hours.
- Information Quality: tourist information is out of date compared with online data

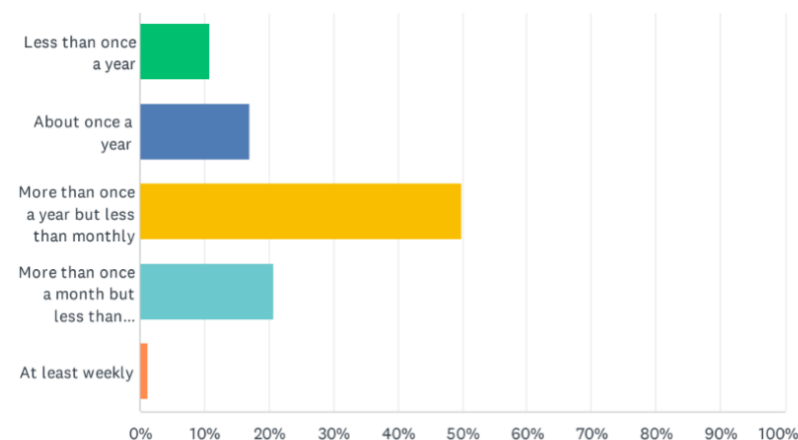
3. Lack of Need/Usage:

- No Need for Information: many respondents stated they "didn't need" or "haven't required" any information.
- Infrequent Visits: Have not visited Lewes recently or enough to answer

How often on average do you use Lewes' Tourist Information Centre Services?

Answered: 82

Most of the visitors (50%) visit the TIC more than once a year but less than monthly, followed by 21% who visit more than once a month but less than weekly.



How has this changed in the last year (since the move to 6 High St.)?

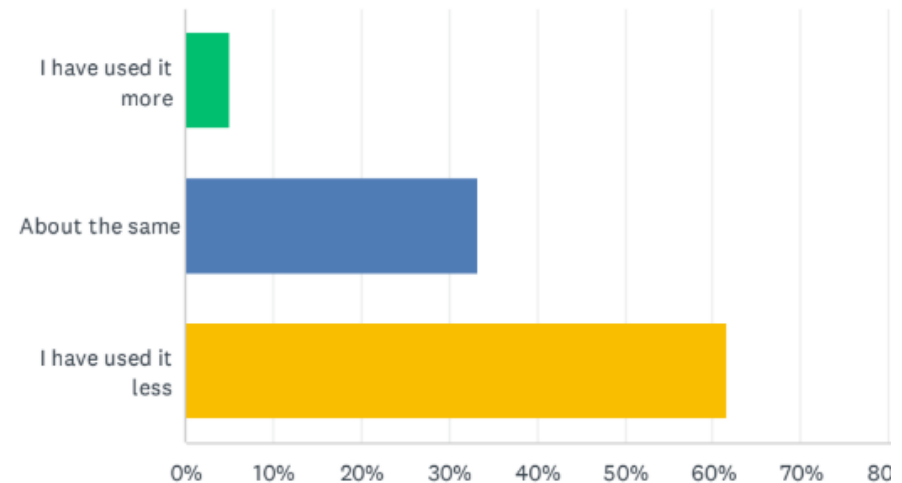
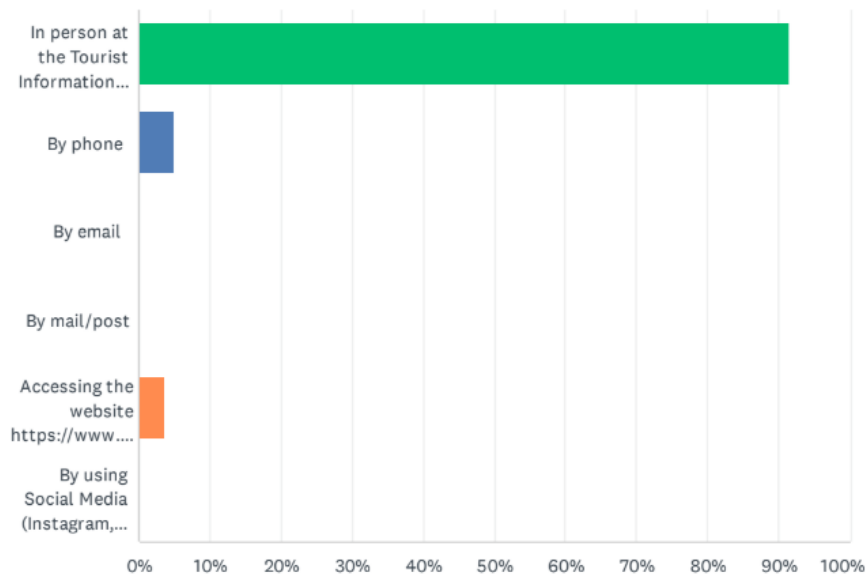
Answered: 78

Most visitors (62%) have used the TIC less since the move in 2024, while about 1/3 of visitors have used the TIC the same amount.

On the last occasion you used the service, how did you access it?

Answered: 82

91% used the services in person at the TIC.



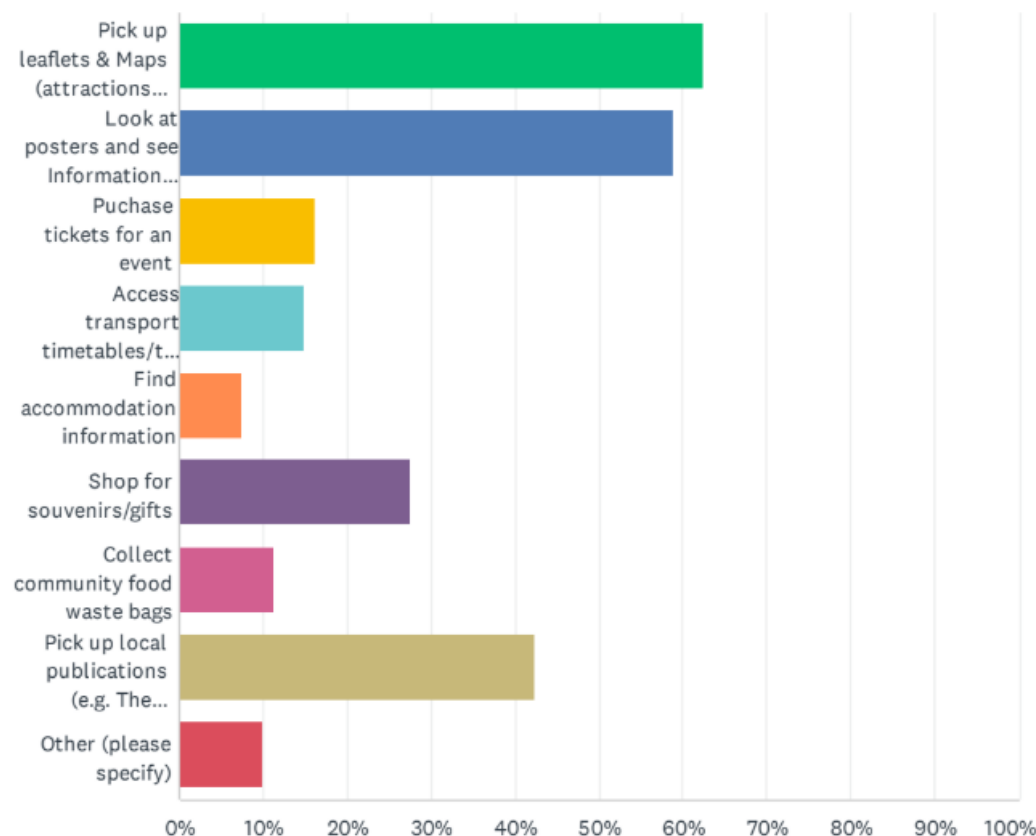
On the last occasion you used the service what did you use it for? (Select all that apply)

Answered: 80

In order, on their last occasion at the TIC, the visitors used the following services:

- 63% used the TIC to pick up leaflets & maps (attractions, walks etc)
- 59% used the TIC to look at posters and see Information about what's on
- 42% used the TIC to pick up local publications (e.g. The Lewesian, Lewes News etc)
- 28% used the TIC to shop for souvenirs/gifts
- 16% used the TIC to purchase tickets for an event
- 15% used the TIC to access transport timetables/tickets
- 11% used the TIC to collect community food waste bags
- 10% selected Other
- 8% used the TIC to find accommodation information

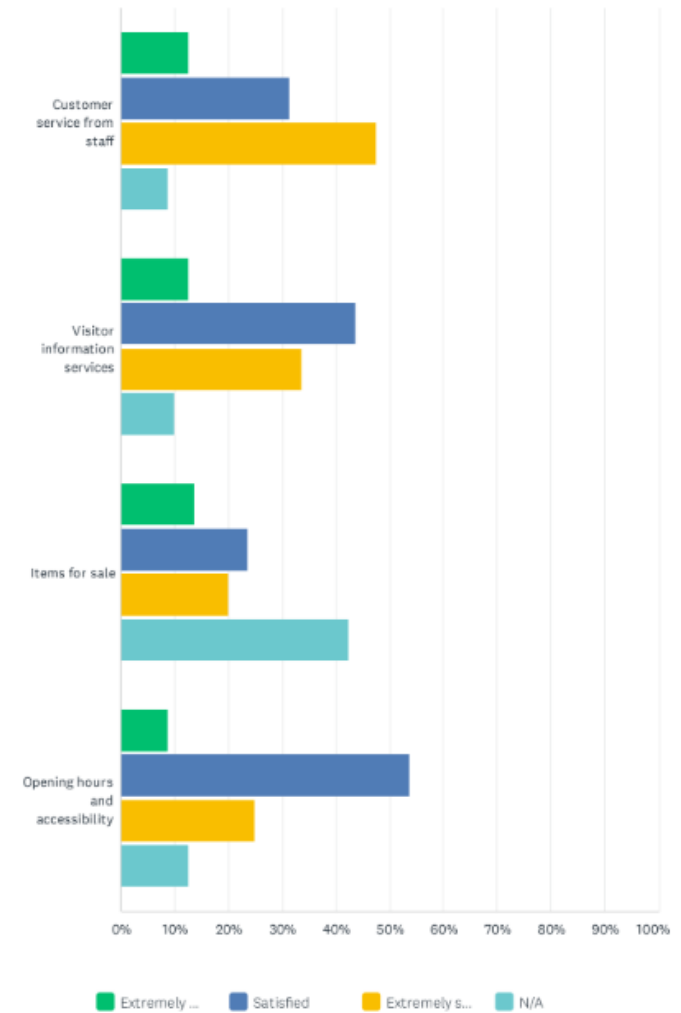
For the 10% of visitors that selected "Other", most of the respondents inquired about Lewes Bonfire tickets.



And how did you rate the service you received?

Answered: 80

Overall, visitors were extremely satisfied with the customer service experience (47%), while they were satisfied with visitor information Services (44%), items for sale (24%), and opening hours and accessibility (54%).



Which of the following services are important to have in Lewes' TIC going forward?

Answered: 91

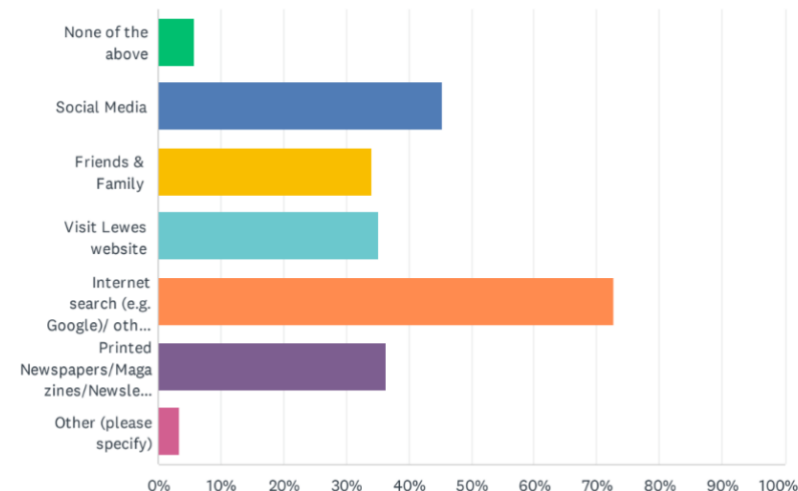
Using the weighted average, visitors mostly valued (in order):

- Leaflets and Maps (59% cited extremely important)
- To be able to look at posters and find information about what's on (60% cited extremely important)
- Transport timetables/tickets (53% cited extremely important)
- Tickets for events (34% cited extremely important)
- Local publications (e.g. The Lewesian, Lewes News etc) (40% cited extremely important)
- Accommodation information (30% cited extremely important)
- Community food waste bags (15% cited extremely important)
- Shop for souvenir/gifts (20% cited extremely important)

Where else do you find information to help you plan trips/leisure time (tick all that apply)?

Answered: 88

Most visitors (73%) ticked Internet search (e.g. Google)/ other websites, followed by 45% who selected social media. Roughly 1/3 of visitors used friends and family, print and the Visit Lewes website.



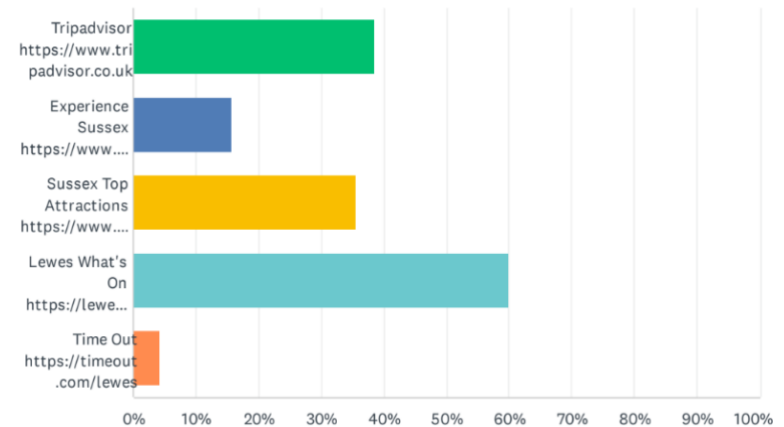
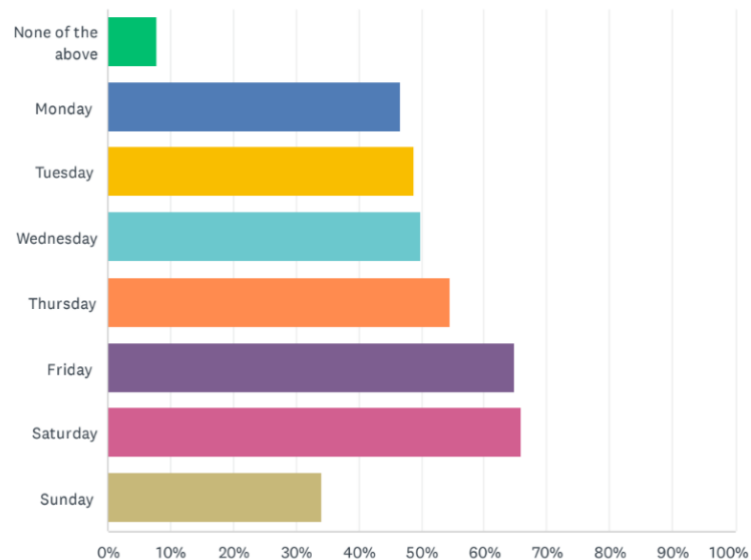
Which of the following websites have you used to plan trips in the area?

Answered: 70

Most visitors (60%) used Lewes What's On, followed by Tripadvisor (39%) and Sussex Top Attractions (36%).

Which days of the week would you most like to access the Tourist Information Service?

Answered: 88



The popularity of the work weekdays decreased Friday to Monday, with Friday being the most popular with 65%. For the weekend days, 66% wanted the TIC open on Saturdays, while 34% wanted the TIC open on Sundays.

What possible locations should be considered for the future TIC? (If you don't know, leave blank)

Answered: 51

Most visitors prefer the TIC to be at the original location of 187 High Street.

Some visitors expressed satisfaction with the current location of 6 High Street. However, many people thought it was too much like a council office.

A general preference for a central location within Lewes was consistently expressed. Several respondents highlighted the importance of proximity to the railway station, recognizing it as a key entry point for visitors.

The Southover House and the Cliffe High Street were both mentioned a few times as alternatives.

Why do you say that?

Answered: 51

Here is a summary of the visitors' views regarding a potential TIC locations:

1. Location & Centrality:

- Central Location: near other attractions and public transportation

2. Accessibility & Visibility:

- Ease of Access: easy to find, not on a hill, near the council offices

3. Building & Space:

- Building Suitability: easy to find, attractive, heritage building, space to browse
- Space/Size: good size for all it has to offer, larger than current location

4. Council/Ownership & Integration:

- Council Ownership/Integration: convenience

5. Community & Economic Impact:

- Community Focus: building community and celebrating the area than just information, being of use to as many people as possible
- Economic Impact: fear of loss of the site, foot traffic

6. Service Quality & Staff:

- Staff Quality: helpful staff

7. Problems/Issues:

- Repair Issues: questions on why the renovation is taking so long

Do you have other comments?

Answered: 29

Here is a breakdown of the general feedback regarding the Lewes Tourist Information Centre (TIC):

1. Location & Space:

- Desire for a Larger, More Central Location: many respondents miss the "old Lewes Tourist Information centre which was a bigger space", requests for relocation to the "original office" and concerns about the current location's limited space and "shared space with LDC helpdesk"
- Shared Buildings vs. Dedicated Space: suggestions for TICs to be located "within shared buildings" or "shared offices like Newhaven and Seaford", desire for a dedicated space, that can show the full range of tourist information.

2. Service & Staff:

- Positive Feedback on Staff: consistent praise for the "kind, helpful, and friendly" staff and the importance of a "friendly welcome to the town" is highlighted
- Need for Local Knowledge & Personalized Recommendations: emphasis on the TIC offering "something that cannot just be googled" and the need for the staff to know the area

3. Information & Resources:

- Desire for More Information & Resources: requests for "more information leaflets, magazines, and posters", concerns about the current limited display space, the need for the TIC to display local art, and local information.
- Online vs. In-Person Information: arguments for the necessity of "front facing tourist information," particularly for older individuals, overseas visitors, and those with access needs
- Counterarguments suggesting "online is the way to go" to save money
- Tourism Trend Data: a complaint that there is little data about tourism trends in Lewes' district.

4. Role & Function of the TIC:

- Importance of the TIC: strong statements emphasizing that "TICs are vital in tourist destinations"

- Expanding the TIC's Role: suggestions for the TIC to "display local work by artists poets etc," "run competitions," and "get schools involved", to promote the less well-known attractions within Lewes, to sell the town and offer suggestions to visitors.
- Specific Issues: issues with being directed to other locations for events, based on where the customer is from.

5. General Sentiment:

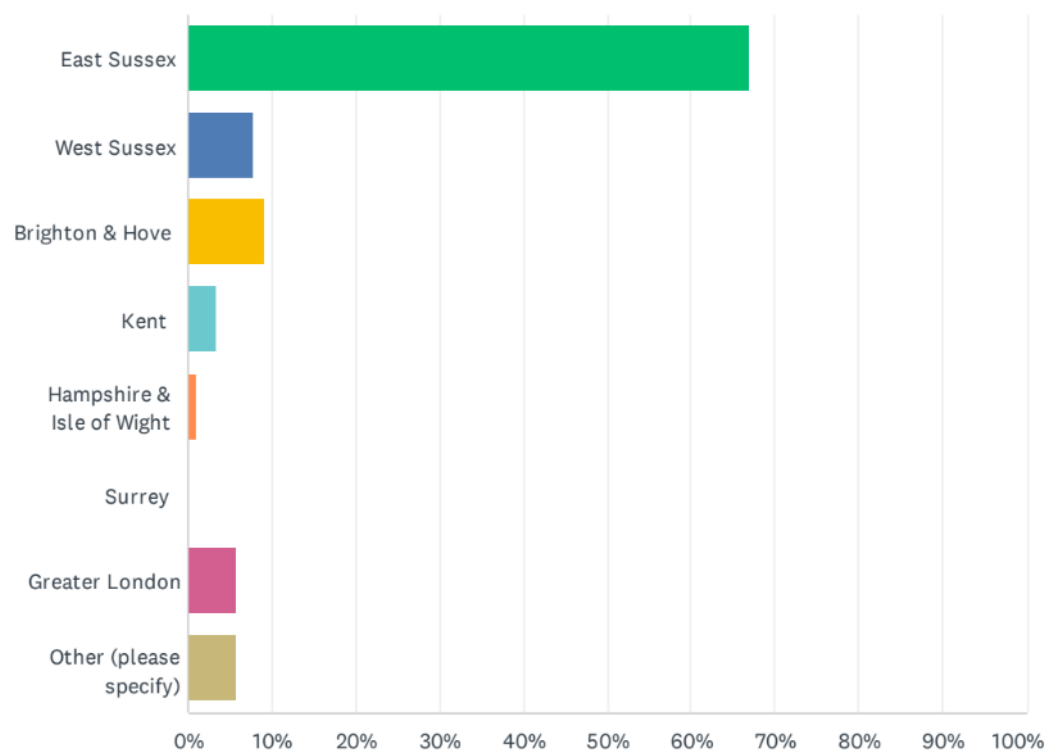
- Nostalgia for the Past: expressions of missing the "old Lewes Tourist Information centre" and new location "not being as good"
- Support for Lewes Tourism: there is a strong belief in Lewes's tourism potential and the TIC's role in realizing it

Where are you from?

Answered: 88

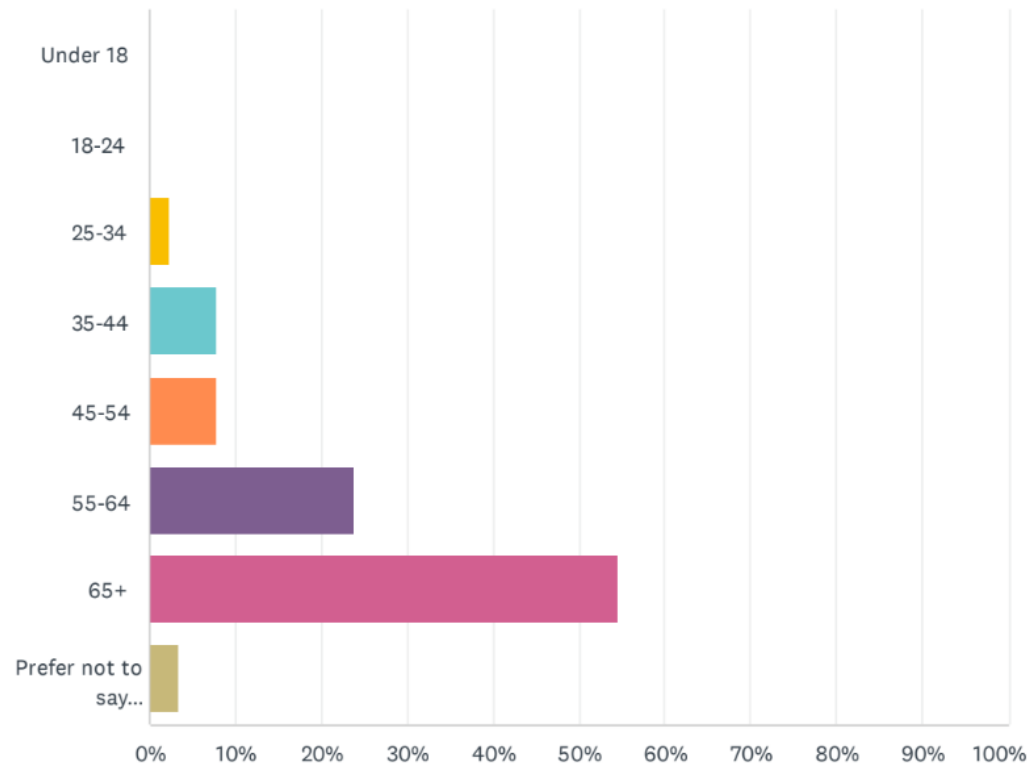
The overwhelming majority of visitors were from East Sussex (67%), followed by Brighton & Hove (9%).

Those who answered "Other" were notably from Waldshut-Tiengen (Germany), Blois (France) and North Lincolnshire.



What is your age group?

Answered: 88



Most of the visitors were 65+ (55%), followed by 24% who were 55-64.

RESIDENT SURVEY

Here follows the findings from residents who responded to the online survey. Differences to visitors have already been shown in the previous chapter.

In which location have you used the Tourist Information Service?

Answered: 961

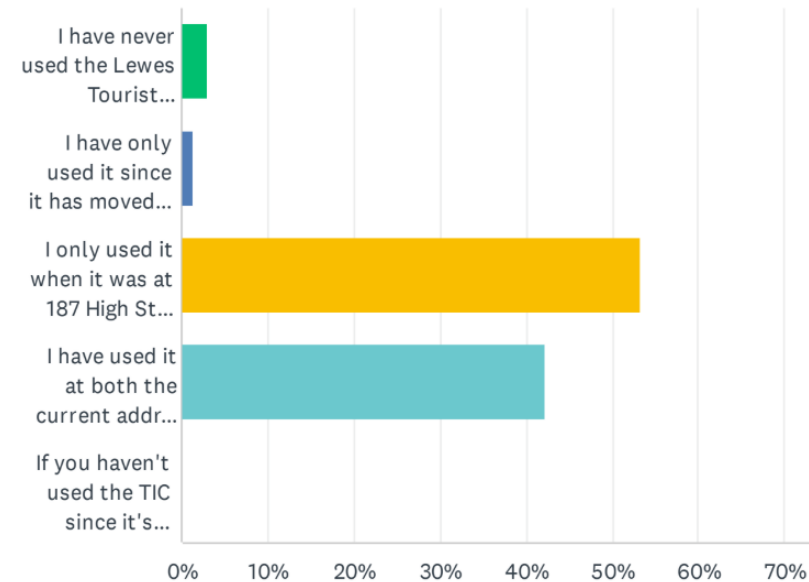
Most respondents, 53%, only used it when it was at 187 High St, followed by 42% have used it at both the current address (6 High St) and the old address (187 High St). (Note: percentages do not precisely match charts due to rounding)

If you haven't used the TIC since it's temporary move to 6 High St (May 24), can you tell us why?

Answered: 470

Respondents are overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the Lewes TIC's relocation and reduced services. The respondents felt most negatively about the following aspects of the new location:

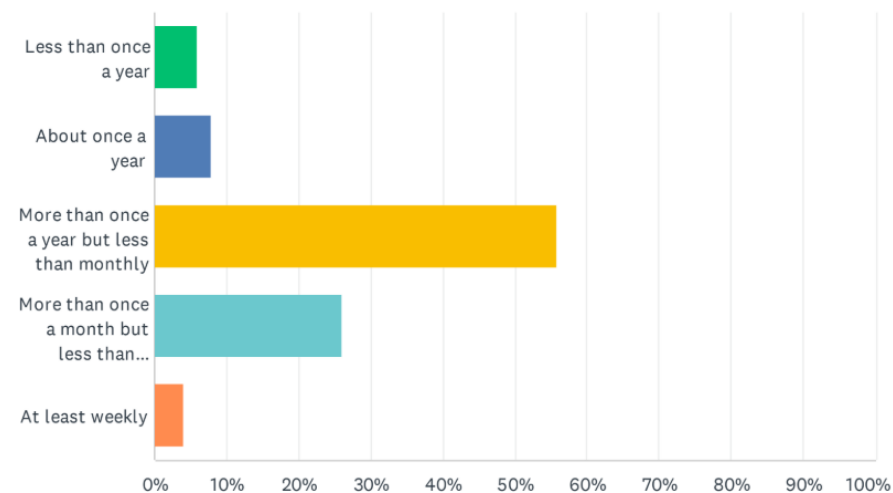
1. Location & Size Issues: the new location is seen as inconvenient, obscure, and too small, lacking the appeal of the previous site.
2. Service Reduction: loss of merchandise (gifts, cards), limited information, and no engaging displays are major complaints.
3. Weekend Closure & Visibility: closing on weekends and poor visibility significantly hinder its usefulness.
4. Nostalgia & Loss: there's a strong desire for the return of the previous, well-regarded TIC.
5. Community Impact: concerns exist about the negative impact on local tourism, businesses, and event promotion, along with local authors and artists.



How often on average do you use Lewes' Tourist Information Centre Services?

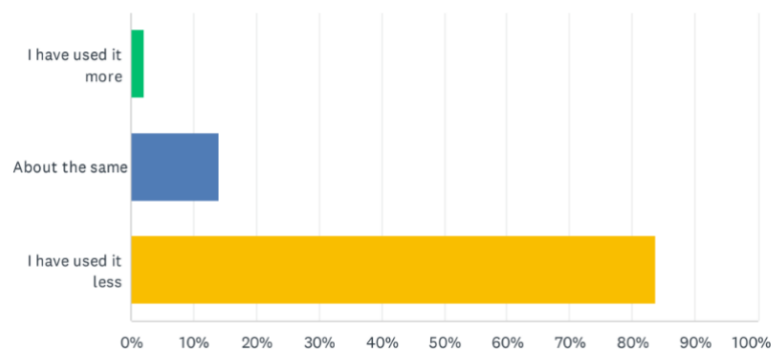
Answered: 893

Most residents (55%) use the TIC's services more than once a year but less than monthly, followed by 26% who use the TIC's services more than once a month but less than weekly. 14% of residents use the TIC's services about once a year or less than once a year, while 4% of residents use the services weekly.



How has your use of the TIC's services changed in the last year (since the move to 6 High St.)?

Answered: 880

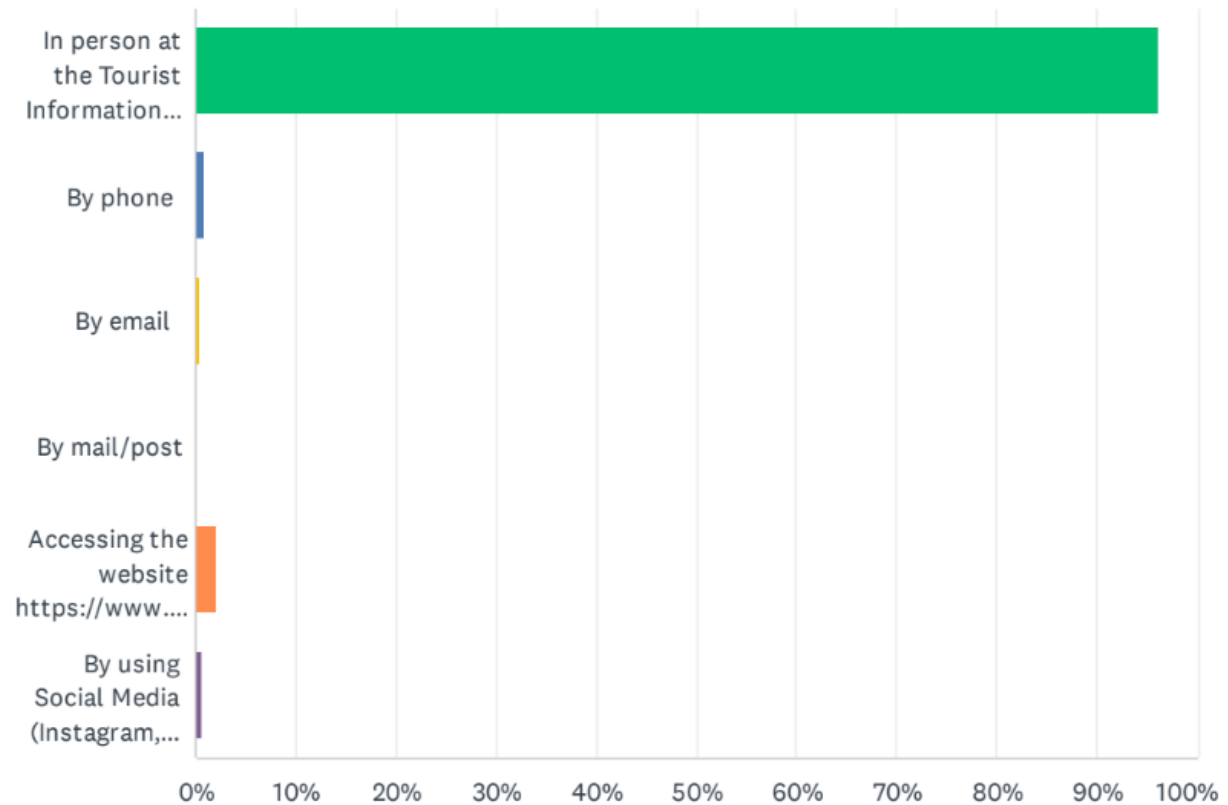


A significant majority of residents (84%) use the TIC's services less since the move to 6 High St, while 14% have used the services about the same amount.

On the last occasion you used the service, how did you access it?

Answered: 893

Overwhelmingly, 96% of residents last used the TIC's services in person.

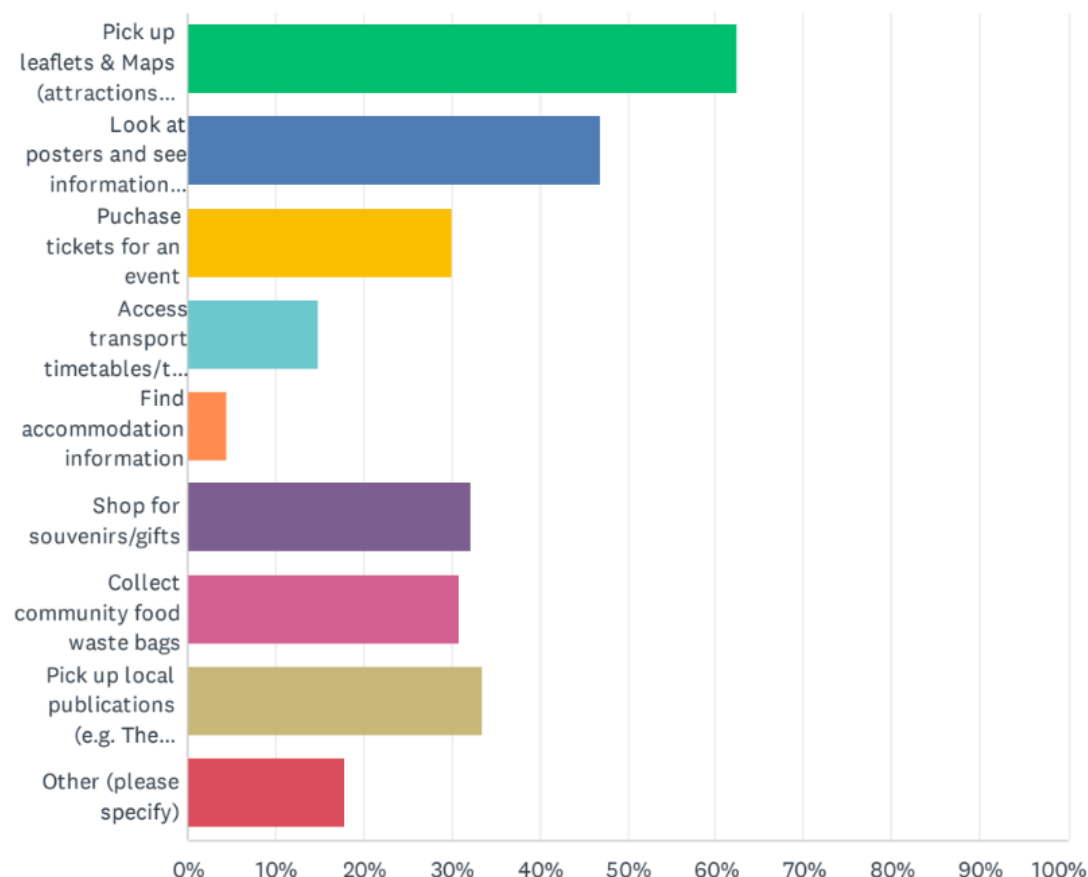


On the last occasion you used the service what did you use it for? (Select all that apply)

Answered: 860

Most residents (62%) used the TIC to pick up leaflets & maps, followed by 47% used the TIC to look at posters and see information about what's on. Around 1/3 of residents used the TIC to purchase tickets for an event, shop for souvenirs/gifts, collect community food waste bags and/or pick up local publications (e.g. The Lewesian, Lewes News etc).

The residents who selected "Other" (18%) mostly cited obtaining local Information (such as service information or community history), purchasing Items like stamps, promoting events and activities, accessing council services, community interaction and browsing.



And how did you rate the service you received?

Answered: 860

91% of residents were either extremely satisfied or satisfied with the customer service from staff, while 5% were extremely dissatisfied.

69% of residents were either extremely satisfied or satisfied with the visitor information services, while 11% were extremely dissatisfied.

48% of residents were either extremely satisfied or satisfied with the items for sale, while notably, 23% were extremely dissatisfied. Similarly, 68% of residents were either extremely satisfied or satisfied with the opening hours and accessibility while 23% were extremely dissatisfied.

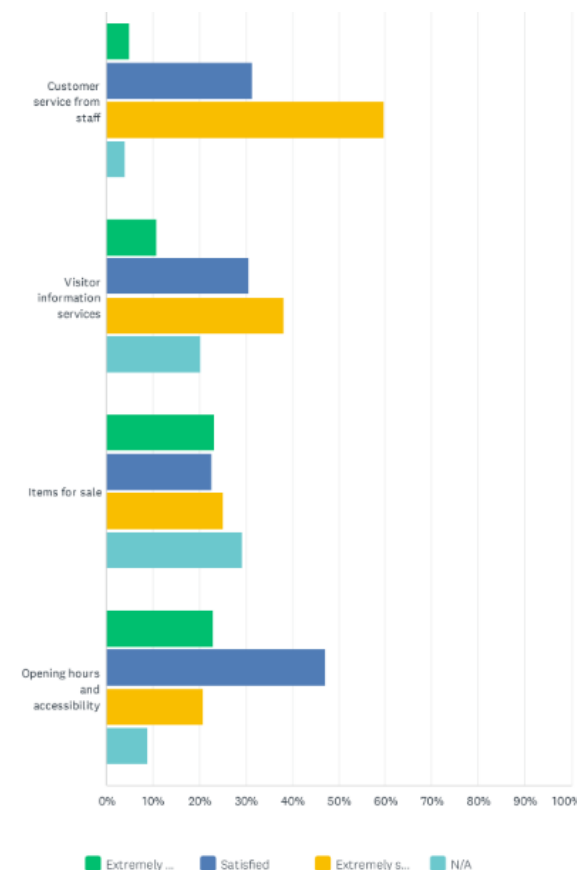
(Note: Any discrepancies in percentages are due to respondents being able to select NA).

Which of the following services are important to have in Lewes' TIC going forward?

Answered: 867

Using the weighted average, residents mostly valued (in order):

- Leaflets and Maps
- To be able to look at posters and find information about what's on
- Transport timetables/tickets
- Tickets for events
- Accommodation information
- Local publications (e.g. The Lewesian, Lewes News etc)
- Shop for souvenir/gifts
- Community food waste bags

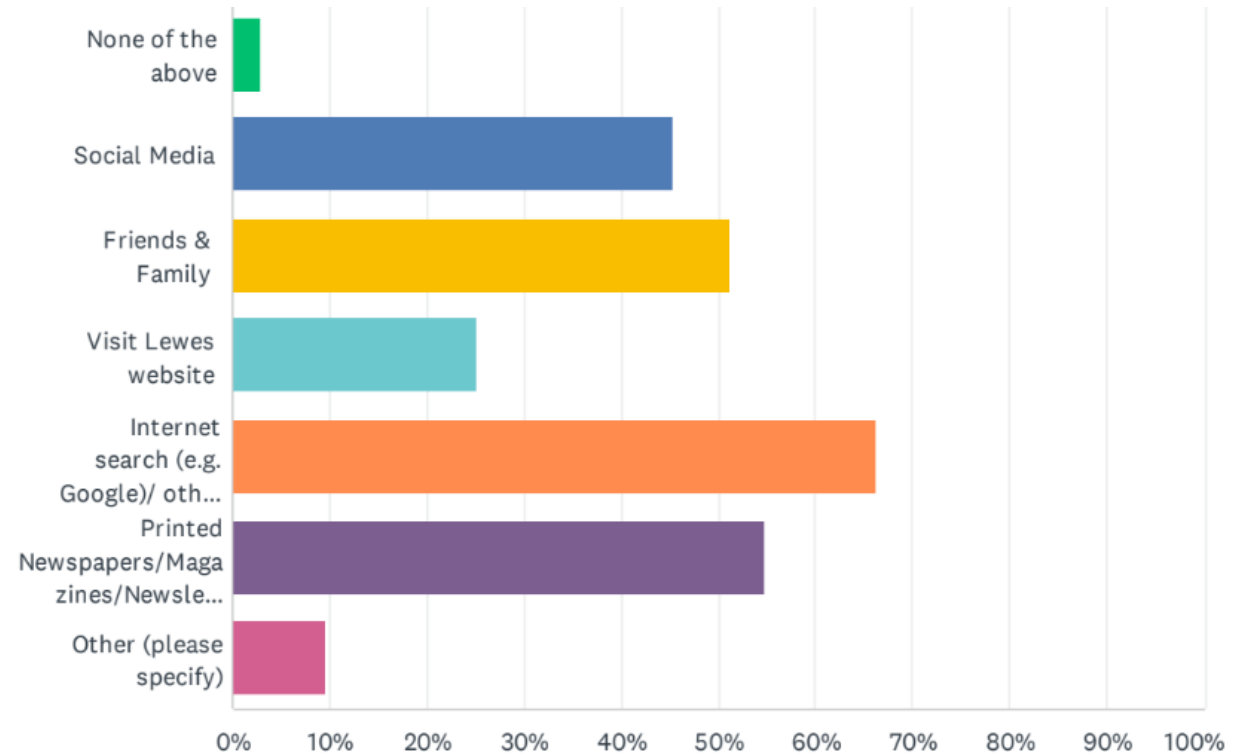


Where else do you find information to help you plan trips/leisure time (tick all that apply)?

Answered: 849

Most residents (66%) used the Internet, like Google search, to help plan their trips/leisure time, followed by print (55%), friends and family (51%) and social media (45%). 25% of residents used the Visit Lewes website.

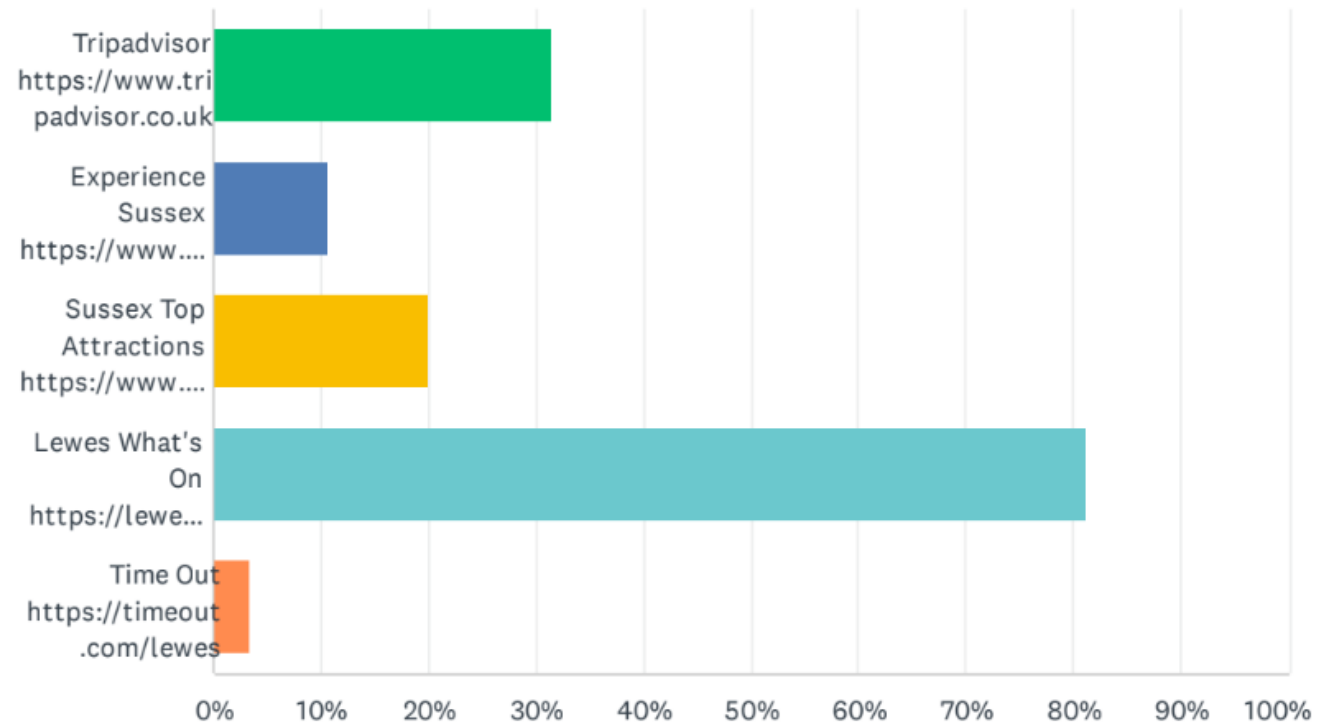
Out of the 9% who selected “Other”, those residents mostly cited physical Posters and leaflets and guidebooks, which could be included in print.



Which of the following websites have you used to plan trips in the area?

Answered: 550

Most residents reported using Lewes What's On (81%), followed by 31% using Tripadvisor and 20% using Sussex Top Attractions.



Which days of the week would you most like to access the Tourist Information Service?

Interestingly, the popularity of the work weekdays decreased Friday to Monday, with Friday being the most popular with 70%. For the weekend days, 85% wanted the TIC open on Saturdays, while 45% wanted the TIC open on Sundays.

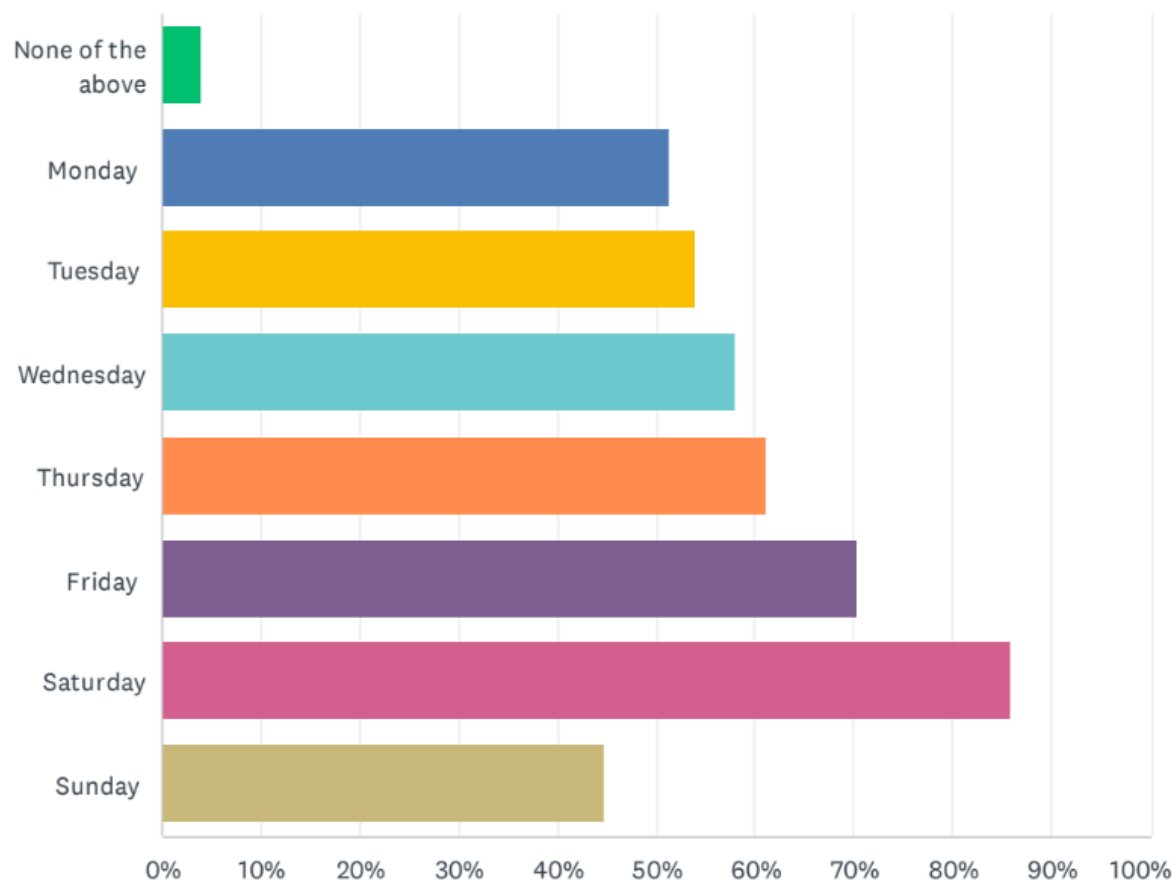
What possible locations should be considered for the future TIC?

Answered: 777

The strong preference is for the TIC to return to its original location at 187 High Street, due to its central location, accessibility, and familiarity. While some prefer the current location, the majority feel it is inadequate.

The corner of Fisher Street and High Street/Station Street are also frequently mentioned. Many people mention the location being next to the town hall.

Some responses emphasize the need for a central and accessible location, without specifying a particular address. These respondents stress visibility and convenience for visitors.



Other Suggested Locations included the town hall foyer, the railway station, the bus station, the Charleston in Lewes gallery/Southover House, the Maltings, near Lewes Castle and various other High Street locations.

A small minority of people said that there is no need for a TIC in the modern age.

Why do you say that?

The overwhelming majority of residents preferred the previous TIC location. Here's a summary of the reasons why the previous location of the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) is preferred by category:

1. Location and Accessibility:

- Central Location
- Convenient for those arriving by train or bus
- Visibility and Prominence
- Footfall and Economic Impact

2. Building and Space:

- Spaciousness
- Character and Atmosphere

3. Service and Functionality:

- Enhanced Service
- Visitor Expectations
- Improved Experience

4. Concerns about the Current Location:

- Inadequate Space
- Poor Visibility
- Inconvenience
- Flood Risk

Do you have other comments?

Answered: 419

Here is a summary of the feedback categorized into key themes:

1. Strong Preference for Returning to the Old Location (187 High Street):

- This is the most dominant theme. Many respondents expressed disappointment with the current location, describing it as inadequate, unnoticeable, and unwelcoming. They emphasize that the old location was ideal due to its visibility, central location, spaciousness, and overall suitability for a Tourist Information Centre (TIC).

2. Inadequacy of the Current Location:

- Respondents criticize the current shared accommodation, describing it as: too small, hidden away, lacking space for browsing/displays, unwelcoming/dingy, not fit for purpose for a town like Lewes

3. Importance of the TIC for Tourism and the Community:

- Many emphasize the TIC's value not only for tourists but also for residents. It's seen as: the "face" of the town, essential for promoting Lewes and the local area, important for supporting local businesses, a community resource (e.g., ticket sales, event info, window displays)

4. Concerns about the Survey and Council Decisions:

- Some respondents expressed frustration with the survey process: short notice for the survey, concerns that the council isn't listening to residents, suggestions that staff are influencing responses, questions about the council's intentions for the old site, criticism of perceived lack of transparency

5. Service Issues:

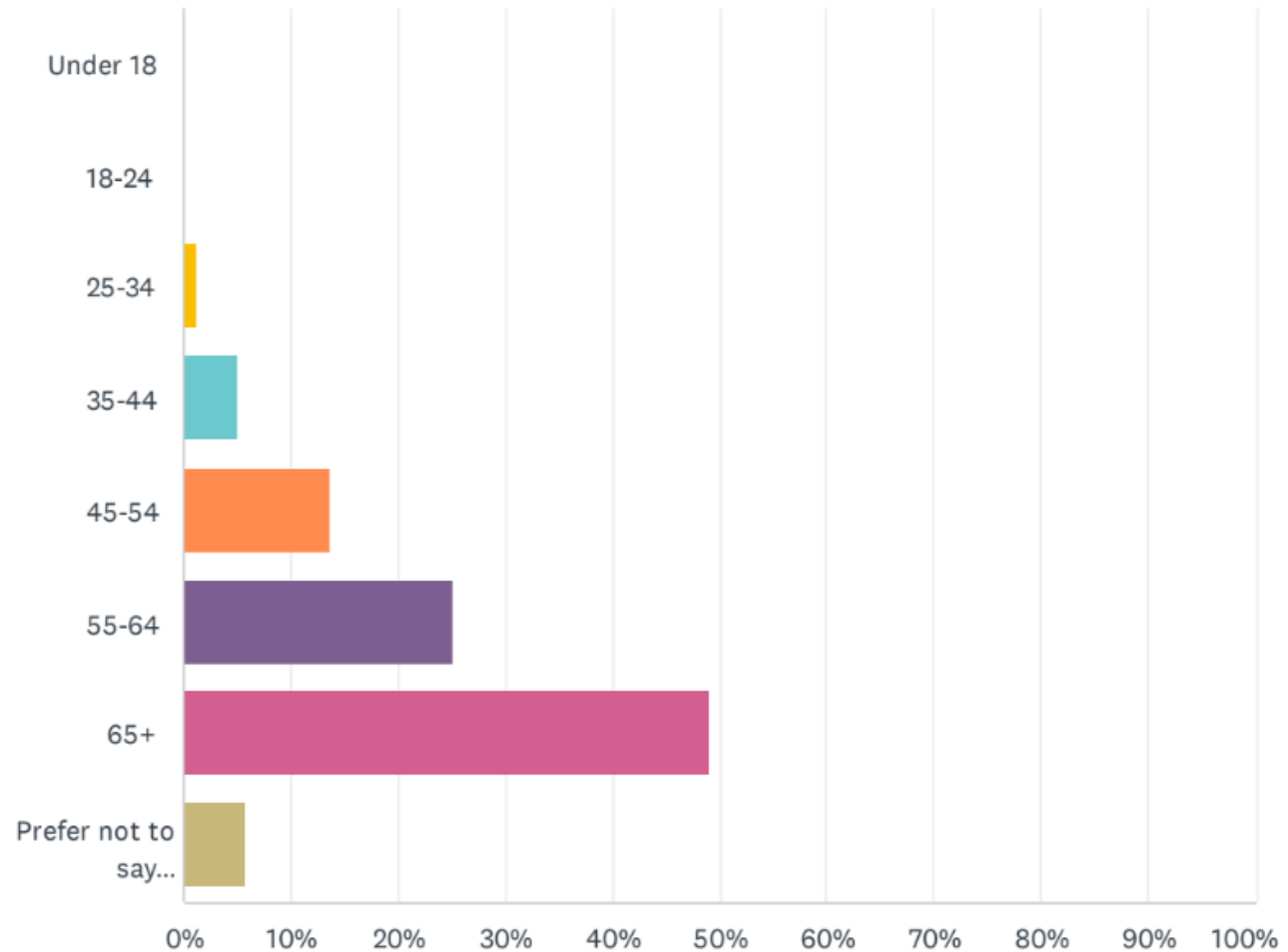
- Several comments mention: the need for weekend opening hours, the importance of knowledgeable and friendly staff, the need for a good range of information and souvenirs

In essence, the overwhelming sentiment is a desire to reinstate the Tourist Information Centre to its former location at 187 High Street, with strong concerns about the current location and the importance of the TIC for both tourism and the local community.

What is your age group?

Answered: 845

Out of the residents surveyed, 49% of them were 65+, while 25% were 55-64, 13% were 45-54, and 5% were 35-44.

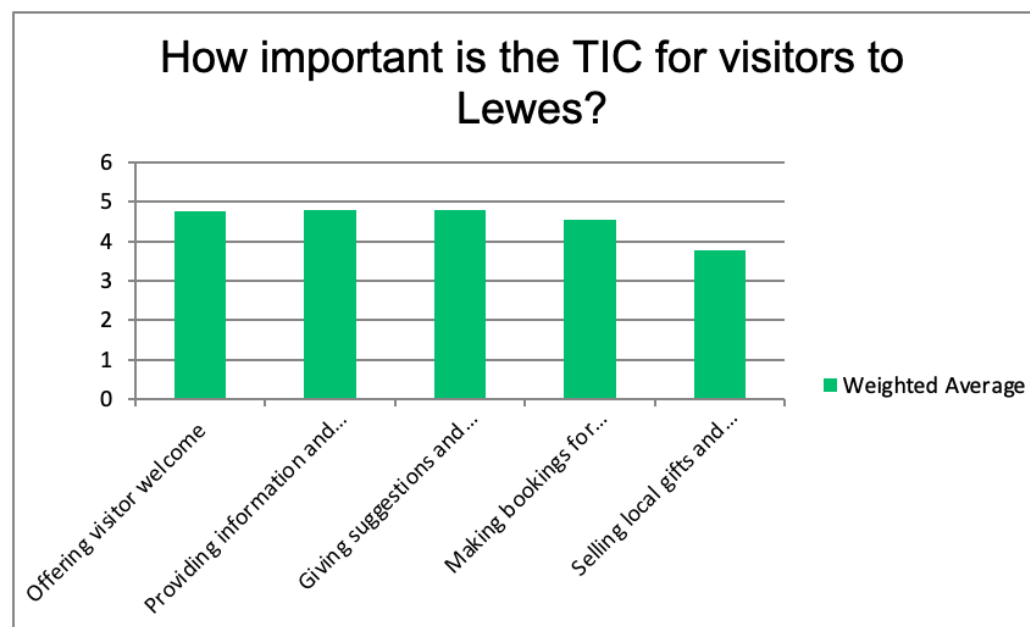


BUSINESS SURVEY

The online survey received 65 responses from businesses or organisations representing 5.6% of all respondents. Respondents overall felt strongly that a TIC is important for visitors to Lewes. The different types of service which could be made available to visitors were all felt to be important (with most rated 'extremely important') but with a slightly smaller level of importance attached to the sale of local gifts and souvenirs.

Open ended responses to the question 'are there other ways the service is important to visitors' resulted in a **positive** sentiment towards the importance and potential of the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) in Lewes:

- **Emphasis on Importance:** responses repeatedly stress the TIC's significance to the town and its visitors. Phrases like "crucial," "vital," "very important," "central hub," and "first place to go" highlight its perceived essential role.
- **Benefits Highlighted:** Responses outline numerous benefits the TIC provides, including:
 - **Information Dissemination:** Providing guidance, advice, and information about local events, attractions, and services.
 - **Promotion of Local Businesses and Events:** Showcasing local artists, makers, clubs, societies, and events through window displays and flyers.
 - **Visitor Welcome and Guidance:** Offering a positive welcome, helping visitors navigate the town, and encouraging return visits.
 - **Community Hub:** Serving as a central point for both locals and visitors to learn about what's happening in the town.
- **Positive Language:** Words like "enhance," "positive welcome," "friendly," and "well-trained" contribute to the overall positive tone.
- **Focus on Potential:** While acknowledging that the TIC might not be functioning optimally currently, the text emphasizes its potential to be a valuable asset to the town.



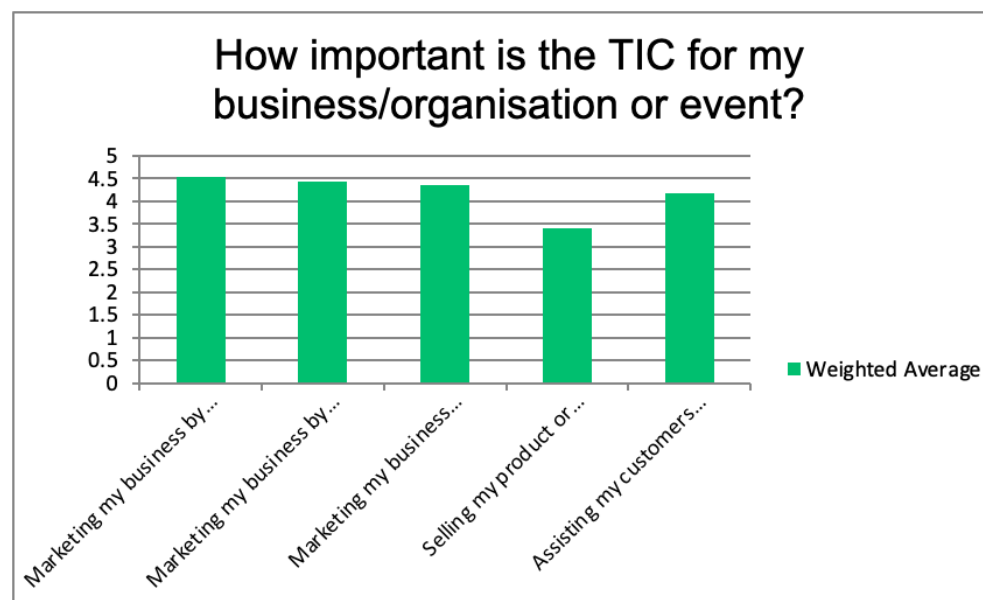
When asked about the importance of the TIC to their business or organisation, respondents again rated different services highly. The services evaluated were:

- Marketing my business by displaying a poster
- Marketing my business by displaying leaflets
- Marketing my business with window displays
- Selling my products or services/selling tickets
- Assisting my customers with their information needs

Sales of products/services/tickets were rated less important than other services.

When asked if there are other ways the service is important, respondents express a **strongly positive** sentiment towards the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) in Lewes. Here's a breakdown of the reasons:

- **Emphasis on Value and Importance:** The text repeatedly highlights the TIC's value and importance using phrases like "key hub," "important community focus," "critical," "good thing," "extremely valuable," and "can't stress enough how IMPORTANT."
- **Specific Benefits Mentioned:** Responses offer concrete examples of the TIC's positive impact:
 - **Tourism Hub:** Serving as a central point for tourism information and promotion.
 - **Community Focus:** Bringing together local organizations and promoting community events.
 - **Heritage Promotion:** Providing window space to promote Heritage Open Days.
 - **Information Source:** Offering helpful information to visitors about events in Lewes.
 - **Event Promotion:** Helping to promote and highlight community events.
 - **Directing People:** Staff providing direct assistance and information to visitors.
 - **Marketing Support:** Allowing businesses to market themselves through the TIC.
 - **Weekend Service:** Providing services to visitors and tourists on weekends.



When asked for specific examples of how the TIC has supported their business or organisation the following key themes emerged:

- **Importance and Value:** Respondents consistently highlight the TIC's crucial role as a hub for tourism, information, and community engagement. They emphasize its value to both visitors and locals.
- **Service Provision:** The TIC is praised for providing a range of helpful services, including:
 - Disseminating information about events, attractions, and local businesses.
 - Selling tickets and facilitating bookings.
 - Displaying posters and leaflets.
 - Offering direct customer service and assistance.
- **Community Support:** The TIC is seen as a vital resource for local organizations and events, helping to promote their activities and reach a wider audience.
- **Positive Impact:** Respondents note the TIC's positive impact on their businesses, events, and overall experience of Lewes.
- **Window Displays:** Many people mentioned the importance of the window displays for the promotion of events and information.
- **Helpful Staff:** Staff are described as friendly and helpful.

Respondents were asked about the other ways the TIC provides value to the local community and economy. Key themes that emerged in responses were:

- **Central Hub and Focal Point:** The TIC is repeatedly described as a central hub, a focal point, and the first place to go for information. It serves as a vital resource for both tourists and locals.
- **Tourism Underpinning:** The TIC is recognized as playing a crucial role in supporting and underpinning the tourism industry in Lewes.
- **Information Provision:** The text highlights the TIC's role in providing information, signposting, and pointing people in the right direction. It is seen as a source of local knowledge and a welcoming place for inquiries.
- **Promotion and Sales:** The TIC is praised for promoting local events, businesses, and attractions. It also sells local theatre tickets and other items, contributing to the local economy.
- **Community Asset:** The TIC is seen as an invaluable asset to the community, helping to keep locals informed and providing a welcoming presence.
- **Location Significance:** The 187 premises are frequently mentioned, emphasizing the importance of the TIC's central and accessible location.
- **Positive Impact:** The text suggests that the TIC raises the profile of Lewes, encourages visitors, and contributes to a positive image of the town.

Respondents were asked what else the TIC could do to enhance its offer for visitors and business. A number of the comments reinforced its usefulness and that it should be retained and keep doing what it has been.

Suggestions for Improvement include:

- **Expansion & Collaboration:** Exploring new avenues for growth and improved partnerships
- **Enhanced Services:** "Offer more books..." & "Offer more services..." suggests broadening the range of offerings with improved "multilingual services". Improving audio visual presentation through use of screens and expanding the range of suggested walking routes were also suggested.
- **Operational Changes:** "Longer opening..." & "Stay open at weekends..." advocates for extended hours, improved signage and addressing the limitations of the current location at 6 High St. Many used this section to advocate for a return to 187 High St.

When asked how the service could improve its income to support and sustain the service the majority of respondents highlighted improving sales of existing stock and books and having a 'local' focus on stock so that it feels unique to Lewes. Expanded charging for services including the window displays was felt to be an area of uplift.

However, respondents also felt that the service should simply fall to the local authority to fund. A lack of appreciation of the pressures facing local authorities and relatively modest suggestions for the ways income could be grown highlights how hard it is to find a financially sustainable model for TIC services.

The next series of questions looked more closely at the two locations (187 High St. and 6 High St.).

The positives of 187 were identified as its excellent location and visibility. The main themes are:

- **Centrality:** The most dominant theme is the central location. Phrases like "central location," "central easily," "central both," "central position," "Centre of Town," and "Perfectly central" are repeated numerous times, emphasizing the prime location.
- **Visibility:** Responses repeatedly highlight the visibility of the location. Phrases like "visible," "very visible," "prominent," "can't miss it," and "great visibility" emphasize how easy it is to find.
- **Accessibility:** The location is described as convenient and easily accessible. Phrases like "convenient," "easy for people," and "obvious, accessible" reinforce this point.

- **Positive Attributes:** The text includes positive descriptors like "warm, friendly," "well situated," "bright interesting," and "good central."
- **Sense of Place:** Phrases like "prime location," "primary location," and "location, visibility" suggest a strong sense of place and importance.

When asked what is not so good about the location (187) many respondents used this question as an opportunity to say, 'nothing is wrong with it'. A handful of negative statements however highlighted some shortcomings:

- The shabbiness of exterior and interior was mentioned – though some of this will have been addressed by recent works
- Periods when it is crowded are seen as a deterrent although the space is relatively large
- The lack of dedicated parking and not being close to parking was seen as a downside
- The location further up the hill from the station was seen as a barrier
- Traffic and congestion on the main road being seen as a deterrent

The positives of the TIC at its current location (6 High St.) are:

- The central location
- Pedestrian-Friendly location
- Accessibility with level access
- Visibility and in a prominent location

When asked what is not so good about this location, the main themes which emerge are:

- **Space and Size Issues:** With concerns about limited space, too constrained and too small to fit what is needed.
- **Location and Accessibility Problems:** Suggesting it is not central or easily accessible, hidden away and with poor visibility with a lack of passing traffic
- **Functionality and Presentation Issues:** The lack of a dedicated space with "just a desk", and an absence of display space. The limited opening hours (especially at weekends) and a view that it is not suitable for tourists and is less welcoming with conflict of users in the space

Respondents were asked what makes a good location for a TIC. Choices included: close to rail/bus services; close to parking; highly visible/high footfall; near to other facilities e.g. toilets; close to visitor attractions; close to retail/dining. While all aspects were broadly important, the uppermost factor was a 'highly visible location' with high footfall, followed by proximity to rail/bus services and then attractions.

Other aspects which were mentioned included:

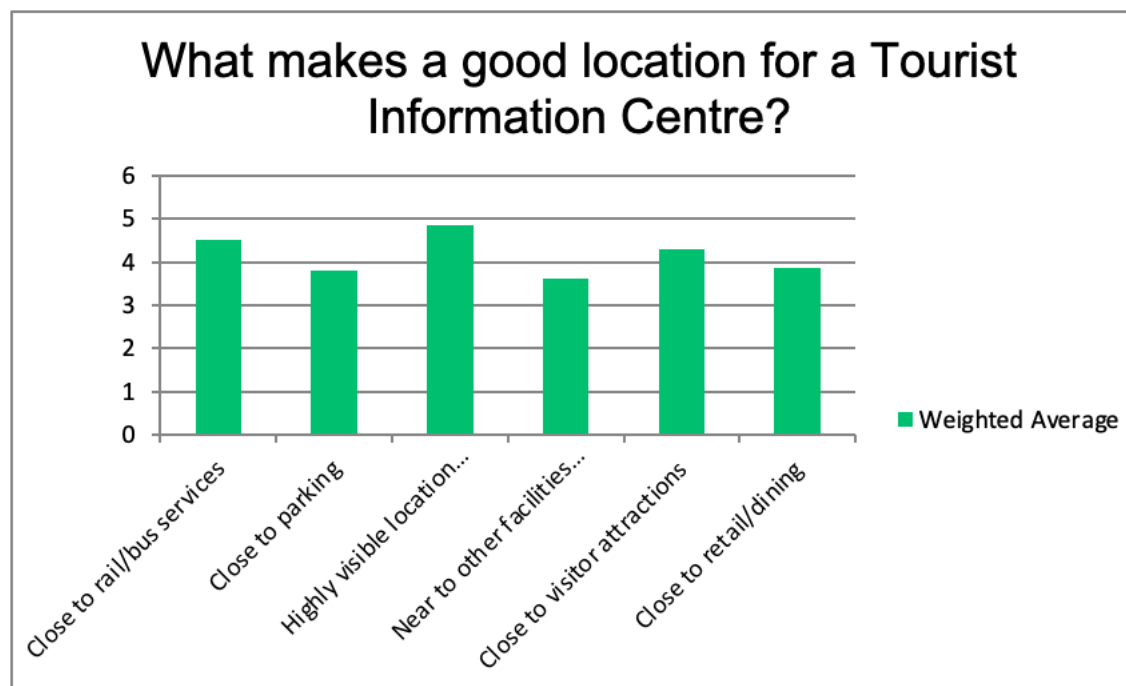
- Being welcoming with good accessibility
- Distinctive appearance with clear signage
- Wide pavements to review external displays

When asked about possible locations for the TIC the overwhelming view was that it should return to 187 High St.

The main reasons offered were to do with visibility and location.

General comments welcomed the engagement and survey in looking at this issue and expressed a pride and passion for the town of Lewes.

While there was some breadth to the respondents from across the visitor economy almost a third of them identified as 'festival or event organisers', almost 20% as community organisations; 12% as retail and 10% as cultural venues.



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