



Image courtesy of Dan Fellow



Background

Bill Fox & Associates Pty Ltd was engaged to undertake the Longford Visitor Appeal Study on behalf of the Northern Midlands Council. The Project Brief was originally focussed on a number of visitor services functions including signage, Wi-Fi, the broader provision of visitor information, along with recommending potential future uses of the Memorial Hall and identifying product gaps.

After the initial visit and consultations, it was evident that the Project Brief needed to be more comprehensive and strategic, and ideally take a destination development approach. This then allowed the consultancy to adopt a holistic view and identify and address those elements that could create a tourist destination over the next five to ten years. However a number of short-term initiatives are also singled out, enabling Council and the business sector to commence the process of creating a viable visitor economy.



Image courtesy of Dan Fellow

Project objectives

Agriculture will remain the key economic generator for Longford and surrounds, however tourism can contribute to the economic base if the experiences and attractions are of a high standard, market-led and focus on the area's key strengths. Tourism is extremely competitive, so it is important to position Longford where it can leverage its strongest assets and continue to build on them.

- What does the town have to offer visitors?
 - How accessible is the offer?
 - How can we collaboratively build a destination?
 - How can we enhance visitor experiences/services?
- or*
- Why come to Longford? Why stay? Where can I eat, shop, have fun?
 - What is our competition?
 - Who is responsible for developing Longford's appeal as a visitor destination?
 - Do we need a visitor centre?



Tourism objectives

It is important to consider the primary tourism objectives which represent the industry standard and are generally applied to most tourism planning processes. These objectives also allow for performance measuring in determining the effectiveness of a destination development plan for a particular place, whether it is located in a city or a region.

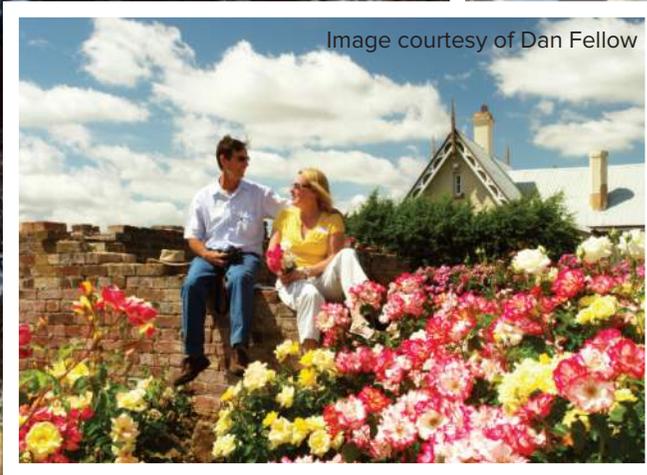
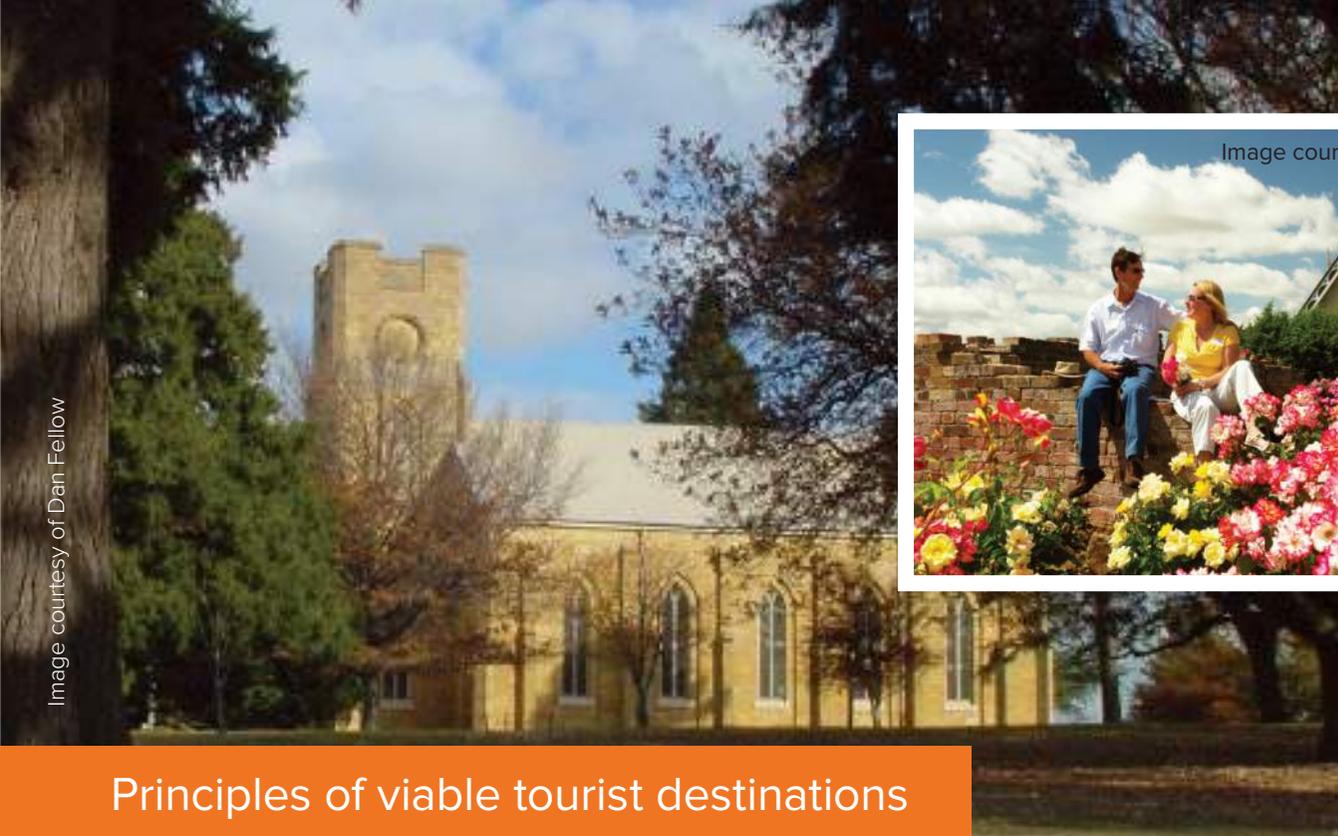
Primary tourism objectives include:

- To increase visitor numbers
- To increase visitor length of stay
- To increase visitor expenditure

(The combination of above is referred to as tourism yield).

- To increase visitor dispersal (both seasonally and geographically)
- To maximise visitor satisfaction.

It is also essential to engage and involve local communities in tourism development and seek their input throughout the initial stages.



Principles of viable tourist destinations

When considering the long-term opportunities and potential for Longford as a tourist destination, it is important to consider those elements that contribute to the success or otherwise of the destination, particularly its longer term sustainability.

The following elements contribute to the destination's success:

- A collaborative business sector with strong and effective leadership
- An engaged and welcoming community
- Appropriate infrastructure and services
- Accessibility
- Appropriate information that is readily available
- Choices – things to do, see, experience for various markets (family, 'high end', adventure, etc.) regardless of the time/season
- Consistency in visitor servicing including consumer-friendly opening hours
- A clean town, that is well maintained and looks 'loved'
- Interesting stories that are interpreted in an appealing way
- Uniqueness, offering something different.

These attributes provide a reliable test as to how an emerging destination measures up and what it can aspire to.



Consultation

A number of one-on-one meetings were held with various business owners/operators, along with three business and community forums held in Longford, attended by approximately 20 people.

All contributions were of value to the information-gathering process with some excellent ideas put forward. A number of proposals also aligned with the longer term positioning being proposed for Longford.

Unfortunately there was an over emphasis by some forum participants on the establishment of a separate visitor information centre (VIC), in the hope it would attract more visitors and more business to Longford.



Images courtesy of Northern Midlands Council and Hubert & Dan

Initial findings

Presently there are few reasons for visitors to stop and explore Longford. The town entrance is very commercial with a strong agricultural feel, the streetscape is uninviting, opening hours are unfriendly and eating options are limited. Most visitors will drive on to the next town. However when considering the longer term potential there are many positive aspects to Longford with the setting and history providing for a number of exciting opportunities.

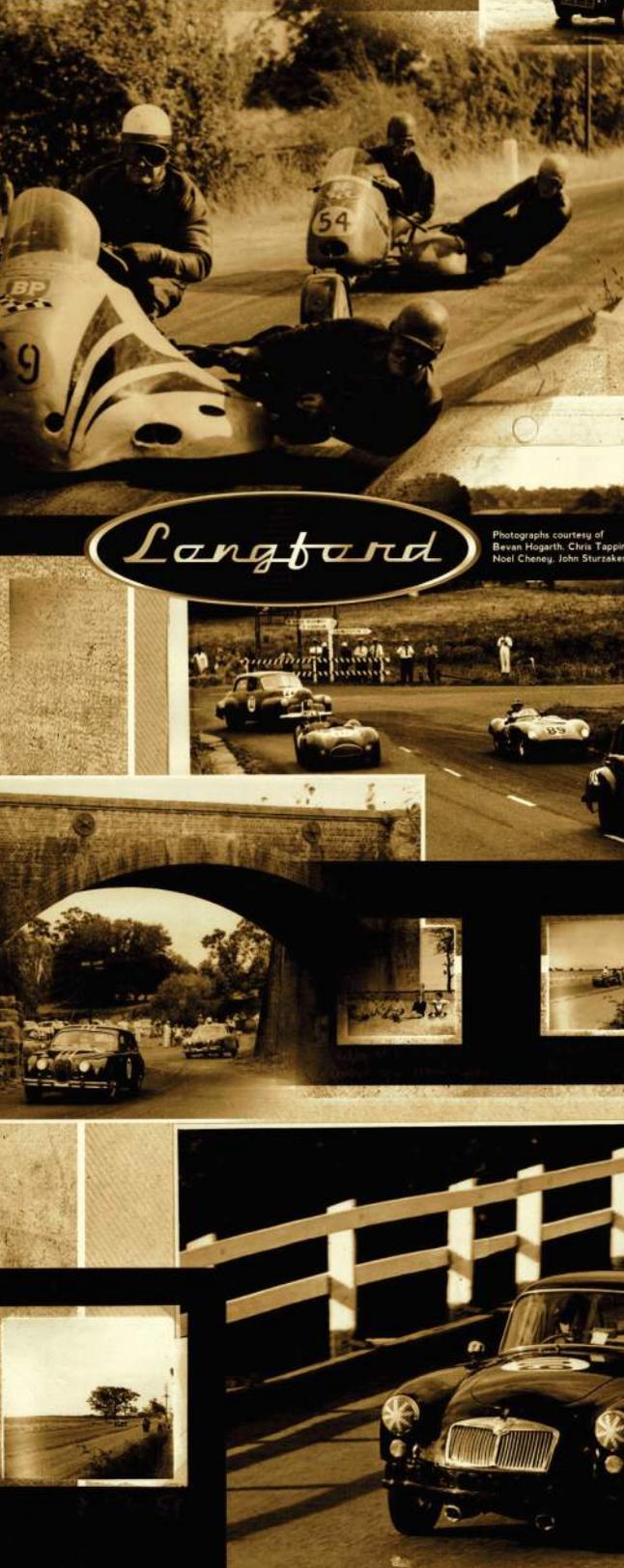
First impressions (positive) were as follows:

- Good service from some cafes/restaurants with motivated and well trained staff (particularly on a Thursday night) Rejuvenation of some historic buildings is taking place
- Very attractive riverside/parkland with huge potential
- Lots of people with lots of great ideas
- A very rich history, full of wonderful stories
- Fun happening with flow-on effects (Aquarius on at the time).

However there are a number of quite major concerns that will require addressing, for tourism to be a serious sector in Longford. They include:

- Insufficient choices and experiences – not a lot for a visitor to do
- Opening hours limited, inconsistent, not visitor-friendly
- Few places to leave your money in town, low yield
- Streetscapes – lacking vibrancy, empty shops, variable signage
- Little evidence of industry collaboration, leadership
- Difficult to find information about Longford on the web
- Physical disconnect within township – a key factor
- Potential to celebrate the rich Australian motoring history associated with Longford has not been fully recognised - additional opportunities
- Serious disconnect between the township and Brickendon/Woolmers
- No sign of an industry partnership with regional tourism organisation (Tourism Northern Tasmania)
- Reluctance by some to embrace change
- Many people were also freely criticising Council, yet not prepared to take a leadership role in doing something about the particular issue.

Whilst there are significant challenges for Longford in becoming a tourist destination, there are equally significant prospects waiting to be realised.



Major opportunities

A number of achievable opportunities have been identified for Longford, with most ideas generated throughout the consultation. At the outset, it is more important to focus the community's collective energy on a few significant projects, rather than trying to develop a broader range of opportunities.

The key elements of developing a destination are to have a point of difference and to build on the existing strengths:

1. **Motor Racing History** – Longford has a motor racing history second to none in regional Australia. If developed to its absolute potential, it would be a competitive strength that could be enhanced through major motoring events, track signage and interpretation, the development of a national motor racing museum and also linked with the nearby Symmons Plains Raceway. The Longford Revival Festival generates significant media interest on the mainland and demonstrates the potential of such an event if the state afforded the event organisers the support it deserves. Motor racing has a huge international support base, with enthusiasts who have both time and money to follow their passion, so it offers the opportunity of a high yielding product for the area.

It is realistic for Longford to build its brand around motor racing history; it is there for the taking.

2. **Equine Industry** – There are five stables in Longford along with four others nearby, with approximately 100 horses stabled¹. Horse racing, training, thoroughbred breeding, show jumping events and trail riding are all or partially developed, positioning Longford as an equine centre for Northern Tasmania. The Longford Cup on New Year's Day is a major event whilst 'The Cleaner' attracted national media attention during 2014 and positioned its home town front and centre for several days. This concentration of equine activity can be enhanced and further developed. A Longford Horse Trail has also been suggested linking Woolmers and Brickendon, and extending out to The River's Edge Café via the river. Such a proposal is achievable and could be considered a short-term initiative.

¹Michael Salhani, (Smart Communities), Paper prepared for Longford Horse Association, January, 2015



Images courtesy of Dan Fellow & Northern Midlands Council

Major opportunities cont.

3. **Cycling** – Tasmania is renowned for its cyclists with a number of riders currently experiencing success on the international circuit. Longford is regularly used for road racing with riders from Launceston and surrounds involved in weekend events. The Longford Velodrome (recently renamed the Kearney Cycling Centre) provides for another level of cycling, enabling a safe, off-road location for all ages and abilities to learn to ride, train and compete. Cycling won't necessarily be 'owned' by Longford, given the popularity of the sport throughout the whole of Tasmania, but it can benefit from both road racing events and those at the Cycling Centre.
4. **Events** – Longford has a number of existing events that attract significant visitors to the area and assist to build the awareness of the township. However, to take the next step in enhancing those events and developing new opportunities, Council could consider preparing an Events Strategy. This would take into account the capacity of existing infrastructure, alignment with current strengths (e.g. motor racing, equine, local produce, heritage, etc.) and the event calendars of nearby townships to fill seasonal gaps. Events are also a great catalyst for galvanising a community. Developing an Events Strategy allows Longford to identify some early wins in growing tourism and raising the awareness of the destination. This should be aligned with the upcoming Northern Events Strategy (TNT) which will cover the whole region.



Major opportunities cont.

5. **Family Fun Park/Playground** – With Longford’s expanding population (predominantly younger families) and nearby Launceston, the town is well placed to create a family fun park/playground. However to encourage outside visitors to come to Longford, the park needs to be different, something quite special and provide a quality experience that encourages repeat visits and positive word of mouth to promote it. Potentially, there are several suitable locations within close proximity to town, all of which would need to be evaluated and assessed on predetermined criteria, should this proposal be adopted. The benefits of such an attraction are weighted towards the local community, which may elevate its priority.



Woolmers



Brickendon

Major opportunities cont.

6. **Historic Heritage** – Woolmers and Brickendon Estates, both World Heritage Listed Convict Sites, have the potential to stimulate visitation to Longford, provided the experiences are such that they meet visitors' expectations. Both properties have their challenges, particularly in containing costs and having sufficient appeal that can increase visitor length of stay. Residents and businesses of Longford need to embrace these two assets and give them the support they need. Despite their global recognition, Woolmers and Brickendon are unlikely to receive the same level of government assistance provided to the Port Arthur Historic Sites so they will require strong, on-going support to attain their full potential as major attractors.



Other opportunities

Targeted product development

Farm gate experiences, for example, are more readily attainable and align with the product strengths of the region. Corner Paddock Berries which sells strawberries from the historic property, Mountford is one such business; another is Longford Berries and Cherries which is open for self-pickers. Given the district is predominantly rural, other opportunities are likely to exist and should be encouraged. Travellers understand the seasonality constraints associated with fresh local produce but do expect access and availability during the growing season.

An Arts Trail is another obvious opportunity and can be easily developed, as has occurred successfully in other locations throughout Australia. Longford has inspired a number of fine artists both past and present, including the renowned, Impressionist painter, Tom Roberts who is buried on the outskirts of the town and award-winning Michael McWilliams amongst others. BRAVE art gallery exhibits contemporary Tasmanian artists, providing an attractive, curated space in the main street. Such a trail needs to be packaged and easily accessed to ensure sufficient visitor interest.

Specific issues

Role of existing committees

There are a number of existing advisory committees servicing the Northern Midlands, with representation from the Longford community and business sector. Within these advisory committees there are also various sub-committees focusing on specific issues. The success or otherwise of these committees is a subject beyond the scope of this study, however most focus on the broader municipality. The Longford Local District Committee covers a range of issues, with tourism overseen via a sub-committee. Surprisingly, there is no dedicated Local Business/Tourism Association in Longford to represent the interests of business.

The existing committees have an advisory capacity to Council only and are auspiced under Section 24 of the Local Government Act 1993. This limits any industry leadership and is subject to Council's final decision as to whether anything goes beyond a recommendation. Perusing the Minutes of the Longford Local District Committee, many recommended actions were repeated over a long period of time, which suggests that a particular priority didn't receive the necessary Council support or was perhaps poorly considered in the first place.

The establishment of a Local Business and Tourism Association would create an opportunity for local businesses to set their own agendas and priority actions and also to partner with Council and Tourism Northern Tasmania (TNT) on particular initiatives. This would create a pool of business/industry leaders, whereas at the moment, all decision-making is left with Council rather than business accepting any responsibility.

During say the first 12 months, initial guidance would be required in the establishment of the association, to ensure a solid foundation. Appropriate support is readily available from TNT.

Recommendations:

1. That the local business sector, establish a Longford Business and Tourism Association
2. That initial, external guidance and support is sought to enable success.



Specific issues cont.

Streetscapes

Longford's main thoroughfare, Wellington Street, lacks vibrancy and appeal, which is surprising given the number of historic buildings lining the street and identified by the National Trust.

The church grounds and the central square are very well maintained but are likely to be overlooked because of the dreary and uninviting streetscape. Many small towns have readily addressed this problem through seeking some professional advice and guidance on improving their visual appeal - reinstating verandahs for example, and installing flags, flower boxes, umbrellas and furniture. Sculptures can also add interest to the surroundings and have been used very effectively in a number of towns/regional cities. Village Well (<http://www.villagewell.org>) is one company that has been engaged to assist Councils in addressing this challenge.



Specific issues cont.

Visitor information services

Visitor information is provided by volunteers operating from JJ's Bakery. A small area has been set aside where brochures are on display and a knowledgeable 'local' provides additional and personalised information.

Currently, there is an insufficient range of products and experiences in Longford to warrant extending the existing facility, which provides the most appropriate option. While it clearly requires some professional advice to make the best use of the service, the cost would be minimal. There is also no reason why other businesses cannot follow suit and provide a similar service if they so wish.

An information shelter located on the Village Green appears rather dark and uninviting. Plans are underway to refurbish it with two new panels featuring a map of Longford which will include a legend of services and facilities and another positioning Longford within the broader municipality and Tasmania. For future reference, it would be useful if this information included the date of publication. There is no central location that has an up-to-date display of events in and around Longford - only an outdated one at the Council Chambers. This is unfortunate as many a holiday has been enriched by the discovery of a special market, exhibition, concert or some other local gathering. The community also benefits from knowing 'what's on'.

Specific issues cont.

Visitor information services

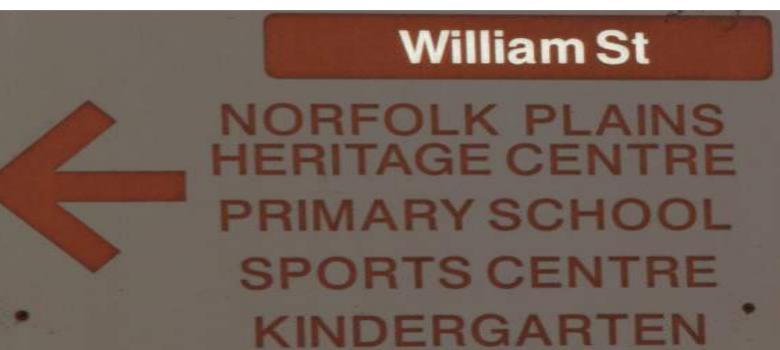
The creation of an interesting and appealing website would also serve those visitors seeking online information, as most visitors to Tasmania would not be aware of the Heritage Highway app. and website, where the information on Longford is embedded and somewhat diluted. Further discussion is included under Current Marketing Activities.

A stand-alone visitor centre would prove a costly enterprise for the Council and therefore its ratepayers. This expense would be far better allocated to projects that would actively encourage visitors to the area; with very little to 'sell' at the moment, most visitor information would involve sending them to other attractions beyond Longford. This issue is explored further under The Case Against a Visitor Information Centre, which has been included as an attachment.

In addition, a detailed response analysing the business case for the development of a stand-alone visitor information centre has been prepared by Launceston-based tourism consultancy, Sarah Lebski & Associates and should be viewed as the reference document for further guidance on this matter.

Recommendations:

1. That visitor information services are retained at JJ's Bakery
2. That professional guidance is provided to the current volunteers regarding setup, information, display, etc.
3. That the existing digital information relevant to Longford is enhanced
4. That a community events board or display is placed in a prominent location in the town.



Specific issues cont.

Signage

Two reviews of signage in and around Longford were conducted in 2014. The first was commissioned by TNT as part of a more substantial project assessing all the Northern touring route signage including the Heritage Highway. Recommendations were made regarding the positioning of these signs.

In response to a request from the Longford District Committee, a preliminary review of Longford signage occurred in July 2014, with the CEO of TNT, Chris Griffin, and representatives from the NMC. The team assessed 'existing road signage at key entry points to the township, and street and directional signage within the town that disperses visitors to key locations in surrounding areas (e.g. Brickendon and Woolmers Estates)'.

The Visitor Appeal Study broadly supports the preliminary recommendations from this review. There is a clear need to standardise the current signs particularly within Longford, itself. Currently there is a combination of older and more recent signs in an array of colour, size and font. Equally, it is important to reduce unnecessary signage, ensure that lettering is clear and easy to read and that all appropriate signage maximises the opportunities for visitors to engage with Longford's attractions, activities and accommodation.

Any subsequent designs must be determined by Council and obviously comply with the road authority's standards.

Directional signage for newcomers wishing to visit Longford is sufficient to safely guide all visitors to the township. There is an abundance of signs strategically placed along the major routes providing the visitor with clarity in both orientation and direction. Signage is not in any way restricting visitor access to Longford. Besides, the majority of future visitors will be guided by and reliant on satellite navigation to reach their destination.

Recommendation:

That street and local attractions signage is consistently and uniformly applied throughout Longford and surrounds.

Specific issues cont.



Wi-Fi

The Brief proposed that the consultants consider appropriate sites for Wi-Fi in Longford. However, during the course of the project, NMC has actually funded the installation of free Wi-Fi for public use in the township. At the time of writing, it has only been 'live' for approximately four weeks, so its initial efficiency and performance is still being assessed. Coverage includes the Village Green, as well as an area extending south down Wellington/ Marlborough Streets from the Town Hall, for approximately 100 metres. Some signage has also been installed in footpaths in the coverage area.

In addition, the Council is currently establishing the cost of free Wi-Fi in selected locations across the municipality - i.e. Evandale (Community Centre), Perth (Train Park), Ross (Post Office), Campbell Town (Valentine's Park), Cressy (Trout Park) and Avoca (Museum and Information Centre).

Free Wi-Fi is unlikely to provide a sufficient reason for visitors to detour to Longford, however it does afford an opportunity and an incentive for visitors to stop and look around - and to share their experiences through social media. It is important to adopt a strategic approach to maximise the impact of free Wi-Fi - e.g. ensure that it directs the user to further information regarding nearby experiences and locations that may be of interest.

NMC is to be congratulated for this initiative, which offers a significant benefit for visitors as well as the local community.

Opening hours

The need to enhance service levels in Longford is a major issue and requires attention. It is apparent that the limited opening hours of a number of businesses contribute to visitors driving through Longford without stopping. The difficulty in getting a decent meal on most nights (except Thursdays) is also a deterrent for staying over.



Business Hours

Monday	9:00 - 5:00
Tuesday	9:00 - 5:00
Wednesday	9:00 - 5:00
Thursday	9:00 - 5:00
Friday	9:00 - 5:00
Saturday	Closed
Sunday	Closed



Image courtesy of Dan Fellow



Specific issues cont.

Current marketing activities

The visitor journey involves several key, decision-making phases and a successful tourist destination provides accessible, relevant and engaging information for each step along the way.

Pre-planning and booking: As this is usually prior to departure, a quality website is required to entice potential visitors and showcase the destination's most appealing assets.

Arrival and en route: Information at airports, ferry terminals, popular businesses and VICs can contribute to the visitor's choice at this stage, although major decisions regarding accommodation for example, will mostly have been determined in advance. Mobile technology is often used to access information via the web and to download apps.

'In-destination': At this point, visitor information 'on the ground' becomes important, helping visitors navigate the range of experiences available in the area. Such information is often in a printed format, however mobile technology can continue to influence visitor choices.

Specific issues cont.

Current marketing activities

Returning home: The most effective and trusted form of promotion is 'word-of-mouth' which also happens to be free! All visitor destinations should ensure that holidaymakers are encouraged and have the opportunity to share their 'magic moments' via its website, Facebook and Twitter pages, Pinterest, Instagram and other similar media.

Longford relies on the print and digital marketing collateral produced by the Heritage Highway Tourism Region Association (HHTRA), which includes all the key historic areas of Tasmania's midlands. There is no single site to promote the township as a 'must-see' destination, and accordingly, it has a minimal presence in the market place when visitors are making critical decisions regarding their next holiday. As noted earlier however, such a website is unlikely to be of value until Longford has a broader range of experiences on offer.

The HHTRA Touring Guide and Map has a print run of approximately 80,000 copies per annum, all of which are distributed within the State. On arrival, they are available at the Launceston and Hobart airports and on 'the Spirits', and as visitors travel around Tasmania, the Guide and Map can be collected from visitor information centres en route. (It should be noted however that the majority of visitors to Tasmania do not use these centres.)

In terms of digital information 'in-destination', the HHTRA'S website is enabled for mobile technology and visitors can also download the Heritage Highway app. for tours, accommodation, facilities and services and points of interest. However, the app. has experienced some technical issues and its functionality is currently being assessed. The HHTRA has an active Facebook page and also engages via Twitter.

The Association participates in a range of advertising opportunities including Travelways, explore Tasmania, Tasmanian Short Breaks Holiday Magazine, the Tasmania Travel Guides (digital and print) and Senior Scene magazine. Such publications can raise general awareness of the region, but their influence is almost impossible to measure.

By far the majority of Longford-specific information is unavailable outside the township. As such, it is a case of 'preaching to the converted' with only very limited possibilities of reaching a much-needed wider audience. The Launceston Travel and Information Centre is a good case in point where there were only three brochures relating to Longford, one of which was the HHTRA Touring Guide and Map. The Centre has approximately 80,000 visitors per annum.

The visitor information service operated from JJ's Bakery has a collection of local tourism brochures, and a substantial number of A4 sheets comprising a mix of practical town maps and amenities and historical information. Much of this information needs to be condensed as the detail is overwhelming for most visitors; it also requires a consistent presentation style and in due course, some material may be suitable for digital downloads.

There are several full-colour brochures featuring Longford (Heritage and Gardens Entwined) however their distribution is limited. An attractive coffee table-style booklet is also available from local operators, NMC, at selected events and online via the HHTRA website, however a cost of \$10 is likely to be prohibitive when so much travel information is freely available.

Specific issues cont.

Current marketing activities

The visitor information booth on the Village Green has been mentioned earlier, and currently does little to inspire the visitor to linger in the town. There are no packaged tourism experiences in Longford.

While considerable effort is put into the Heritage Highway website, the ability for each, individual town to capture the potential visitor is dependent on prior knowledge regarding the location of the Heritage Highway touring route and the places within that area. Finding information about Longford (pre-planning) on the web is both difficult and frustrating.

The best opportunity for promoting Longford is through the TNT website; as the key source of visitor information for Northern Tasmania, it has the capacity to reach a wider audience. Only three attractions are listed for Longford - Woolmers, Brickendon and the golf club and there were no restaurants. The Top Spots area offered no real incentive for visitors with several sections completely blank and the Top Postcard Photo Stop (s) for the Heritage Highway are all in the Tamar Valley!

Industry operators in Longford do not participate in TNT cooperative marketing campaigns as they consider them too costly.

Tourism Tasmania's, Discover Tasmania (DT) website lists the same three attractions noted above and the Local Tips section only lists three things to do in Longford, one of which is actually in Perth. It is unsurprising therefore, that visitation to Longford has continued to decline in the last four years.

On-selling is a simple method of increasing business through referring customers to another experience/business in town. Visitors love local recommendations and will generally follow them up, However initial discussions suggested that this is not occurring in Longford.

Although Longford doesn't have a critical mass of visitor experiences as yet, there are a few useful, interim actions that require implementation.

Whilst not a priority action, and as noted previously, a stand-alone website for Longford needs to be developed as further visitor opportunities come to fruition.

Recommendations:

1. That Longford's profile on both the DT and TNT websites is maximised
2. That operators are encouraged to place their brochures at the Launceston Travel and Information Centre (LTIC)
3. That the current 'in destination' visitor information is reviewed in terms of presentation, content, purpose and overall ease of use
4. That operators package their products and experiences, initially around major events, and sell them through the LTIC
5. That the purpose and content of the visitor information booth is reconsidered
6. That Longford business owners learn more about each other's products and experiences and develop an active network of referrals.



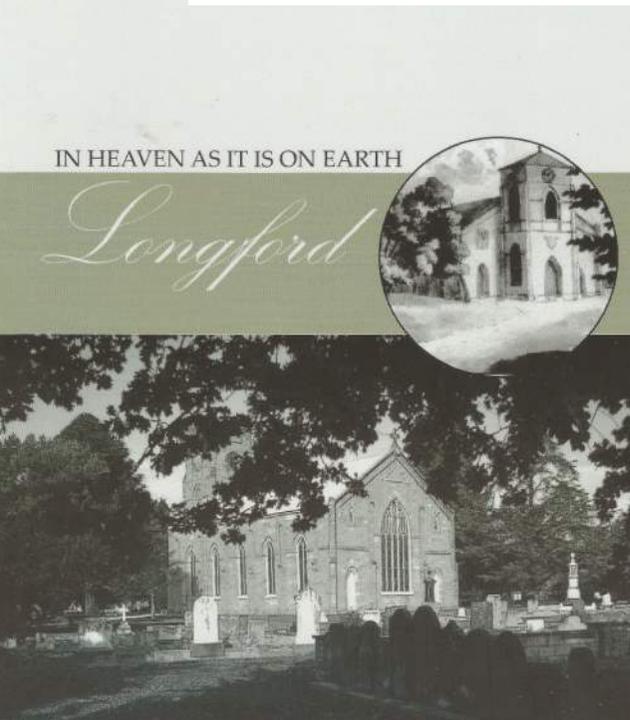
Specific issues cont.

Use of Memorial Hall

In considering the future purpose of this well situated, public facility, it is clear that Council will not only have to take into account the needs of the community, but also the commercial potential of the asset. The building's prime location suggests many more opportunities beyond its present use.

Recommendation:

Given Longford's fame as a motor racing destination, one option for the future use of the hall could be as a museum where that rich motor racing history could be on full display. Exhibits would soon become available on loan and for display from the owners of both cars and memorabilia associated with the Australian Grand Prix. This attraction could form the basis of the market positioning for Longford. It could also be the home of the Longford Revival. The opportunities are exciting and unlimited.



Images courtesy of Heritage Highway Tourism Region Association

Specific issues cont.

Interpretation – Heritage

The evocative, *Voices from the Grave* provides a superb example of heritage interpretation in Longford. The same could be said for the *Skulduggery* story, *Where There's Smoke...* based on a true, nineteenth century incident of some local notoriety. However they are easily overlooked by potential visitors in a crowded market place, and would benefit from a more comprehensive interpretation strategy for the township.

Longford is fortunate to have two World Heritage Convict Sites, which have been universally recognised for their highly significant heritage values. Both Brickendon and Woolmers Estates provide a unique insight into the most compelling aspect of Tasmanian colonial life - the convict story.

While there are several directional signs, there is nothing to suggest the powerful and inextricable link between Longford and these very special properties - even though their respective stories are intrinsic to the history and development of the area.

The Longford community should consider tangible and meaningful interpretation that connects the Estates to the town's streetscapes - in a similar way that Campbell Town developed the Convict Brick Trail. Such an approach should provide mutual benefit, encouraging those who have visited the Estates to explore the town further and vice versa.

Recommendations:

1. That an initial approach is made to the University of Tasmania, specifically to renowned historian, Prof. Hamish Maxwell-Stewart with a view to discussing the assistance that could be available through the School of Humanities regarding the interpretation process - including funding opportunities and research.
2. That business, community and the Estates work collaboratively to explore their shared narrative and how it can be connected in an engaging and innovative way.



Image courtesy of Rock & Rodz

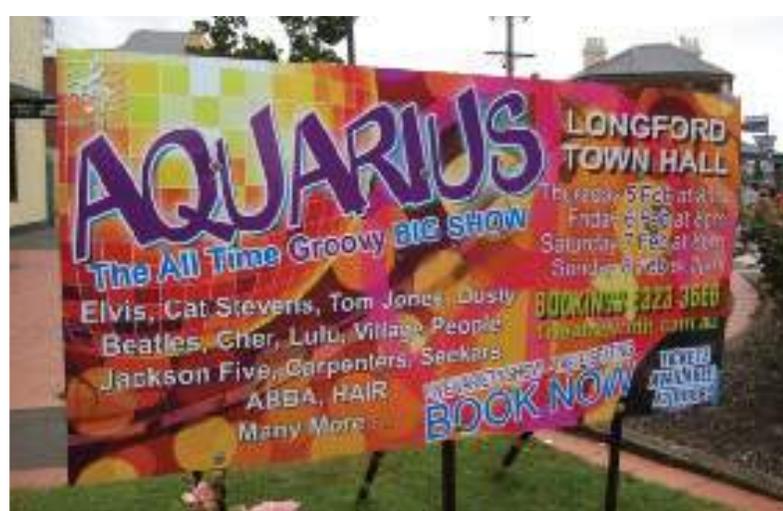


Image courtesy of Northern Midlands Council

The way forward

1. Business collaboration – establish an independent business and tourism association; (Longford has the business leaders within to sustain an industry association).
2. Determine your primary positioning – motor racing history. Own it and develop opportunities aligned with Longford’s rich motor racing story.
3. Have a Plan
4. Prioritise projects and work with Council.
5. Have some early wins e.g. enhance your existing events and celebrate success.
6. Community engagement – for tourism to prosper, it is important that the local community is engaged and involved in decision-making, volunteerism, events, etc., as they then understand the flow-on effects from a successful visitor destination.

Disclaimer

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This report and its contents are not to be referred to, quoted or used by any party in any statement or application, other than by Northern Midlands Council without written approval from Bill Fox & Associates.

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Attachment

The case against a visitor information centre

Throughout the consultation process, a number of individuals raised the need for a stand-alone visitor information centre to be located in the Memorial Hall. The suggestion was challenged by the consultant on each occasion and reasoning provided as to why this proposal should not proceed and that the funds required would be better allocated to projects that would attract visitors.

A considerable amount of work has been undertaken in relation to the establishment and operation costs of Visitor Information Centres (VICs) by most states and territories, all arriving at the same conclusions. The most recent studies have also focussed on the considerable impact of the digital applications now widely used for pre-planning (before travelling) and during the trip/holiday.

When an operator who attended the business forum was suggesting that a stand-alone VIC should be established, the consultant asked what Longford had to offer. The operator responded, 'well, if we had a VIC, we would send visitors to Evandale, Campbell Town, the Highlands and other places'. There was no mention of any attraction in Longford!

The following summarises the conclusions many have arrived at:

- VICs do not attract visitors to a destination
- There is a need to take into account the broader VIC network – where the visitor has just come from and where they are travelling to next
- The destination must have something to sell – lots to see and do, lots of options available to choose from
- VICs do increase length of stay if there are plenty of choices/experiences on offer
- VICs cost at least \$100k to run and you must ask 'is that the best use of \$100k'? The cost of servicing a visitor varies from 50c per visitor (150,000 plus visitors to the centre) up to \$15 per visitor (less than 50,000 visitors)
- The best option for small towns is to combine visitor information with another business in a good location with high footfall and consumer-friendly opening hours
- Bookings and merchandise rarely make a profit when full service costing is applied
- Many operators refuse to pay sales commission and obtain their bookings from the web
- VICs are becoming obsolete - a fad of yesteryear – enter the digital world.

Specific to Longford

- Very little to sell to visitor at this point in time – cannot justify the cost of a centre
 - Currently no reason to stay longer and very few opportunities to spend money
- Insufficient products/experiences in and around town
 - JJs Bakery is the only food outlet open 7 days
 - Insufficient accommodation stock (to sell/for commission)
- Non-friendly opening hours/days - inconsistent service levels
- The majority of visitors have just left Launceston or Devonport and are not looking for information at this stage in their journey
- No collaboration re business opening times
- High expectations from business that Council should fund/fix problems
- Visitors would be disappointed with existing 'offer' - unmet expectations.