

## **TICs Prove their Value**

We all know that the downturn in the economy is putting increasing pressure on the budgets of local authorities. This is causing a large number of them to look at the services and facilities that they provide and make hard choices about where savings can be made. The easy targets for cost savings are in the services and facilities that local authorities don't have a statutory requirement to provide and where councils don't see any economic benefit being generated.

One of the services that seems to be continually at the forefront of cost savings reviews is the network of 495 Tourism Information Centers located throughout England. The fact that they provide little in the way of direct benefit to local ratepayers (locals generally know their way around the destination and are aware of its attractions) and that they don't actually attract new visitors to the destination, leads many councils to question what benefit they provide to the local economy.

Luckily a new piece of research by Tourism South East for VisitEngland shows that there is a very powerful economic case for maintaining the TIC network. The study sampled visitors to 62 different TICs located throughout England. The study found that just under half of the customers that used the TICs ended up visiting more attractions than they would have otherwise or extended their stay in the area.

The results of this study make quite a compelling case. On average, these visitors spent £55 per person more than they originally planned with total incremental expenditure generated by the TIC network in England being more than £170m per annum. This equates to each TIC generating, on average, over £340,000 in incremental expenditure per annum for the local economy.

The report also identifies two other economic benefits that the researchers were not able to quantify – the additional spend the TICs generated through encouraging people to visit destinations outside their area, and the economic benefit associated with the TICs turning phone and email enquiries into visits to the destination.

Overall, with the focus of national and regional government being on stimulating the economy and supporting jobs, the study shows that TICs have a valuable role to play.