

Minutes

Economic Scrutiny Panel

10th June, 2008 Mayor's Chamber, Town Hall

Present: Councillor Hopgood (in the Chair) and Councillors Bartle, Colledge, Guy, Lightley, Marsden, Plews, Simmons, Simpson, Smith, Stoddart, Walker & Wilkes

Also Present: Councillors: Kelly and Kellett
Harvey Dowdy -- Regeneration Manager, 2020 Vision
Martin Boulton – Tourism & Conference Officer, City of Durham
Kate James – Events Co-ordinator, City of Durham

1. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence received.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13th May, 2008 were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

3. Review of Tourism

A presentation was given by Regeneration Manager of the 2020 Vision, giving background information on why Durham City Vision was set up and its purpose. Regular meetings are held with Executive Members and Executive Director giving updates on the Masterplan.

The Partnership Board comprises of members from Dean and Chapter; University of Durham; Durham County Council; City of Durham; One North East; North East Chamber of Commerce and a member from the Private Sector.

The Durham City Vision Masterplan was launched last year, there are 13 strategies The plan intends to celebrate and where appropriate, develop or preserve aspects of Durham City that are important to residents and visitors.

The work programme is divided into three areas – core physical; supporting and software.

The board have discussed the overall vision and agreed that the following projects were those of the highest priority:-

- Heart of the City – Market Place and Vennels
- World Heritage Site Visitors Centre
- Former Ice Rink Site
- Claypath
- North Road/Place
- Riverbanks and Gardens

The Market Place will be the first area to be addressed looking at seating, lighting, surfaces. Members expressed concern at removal of the cobbles and the current seating.

There were challenges in the form of Sub National Review; local government reorganisation; Re-shaping the Agency and the comprehensive spending review but there were also opportunities in how to do things differently and greater 3rd and private sector involvement.

Members asked about signage and were advised that there had been problems with obtaining funding for delivery but that the Signage Strategy is nearing completion

The Events Co-ordinator informed the Panel that she had now been in post eighteen months together with the Events Support Officer, they had taken the holistic approach and taken a strategic look at events in the City. Particularly addressing 'what is here and is working, what is here and is not working.'

The Events team are building partnerships with County Durham Tourist Partnership and have secured funding with the Arts Council and Culture 10. The feedback received from funders is positive. Feedback received concerning the Durham Mystery Plays is that funders are very interested in supporting this event.

The Panel were advised that the Light Festival will feature four major installation pieces on Elvet; Framwelgate; Prebends and Kingsgate bridges. The installations will appear on or under bridges, thus making Arts and Culture accessible to all. It is expected that there will be national as well as international media coverage for this event.

Note: 6.30 p.m. Councillor Kellett left the Meeting

The Chair warmly thanked the regeneration Manager and the Events Co-ordinator for their excellent and informative presentations.

Members asked whether the Council was working with the bus companies to transport people in the outlying villages to and from events in the City.

The Park and Ride did not stay open for the Jules Holland event in the City last summer, however, they now know that the event was a huge success and it is hoped that for future similar events they would be involved.

Members discussed the problems with other means of transport such as trains, especially how the numbers of trains stopping in Durham has reduced. The Regeneration Manager advised that she would take the opportunity of the opening of the Railway Station steps to talk to the National Express hierarchy. Councillor Wilkes informed Members that he had written to National Express about this and had been informed that it would appear in their magazine 'Live Wire'. Members noted that the services available to travellers on the Southbound side were much improved.

Another issue connected with transport that concerned Members was the closing of the Arriva Travel Centre, and that the public had lost this service. The Tourism and Conference Officer advised members that after the closure of the information centre had received numerous enquiries about bus services from local people. The TIC now offers this service as it is often easier to do this. Members suggested that bus companies run buses later when events were scheduled, this would be beneficial to the environment and the bus companies would make a profit as the buses would be full. Members were informed that this would require a two pronged attack from the events side and the political side.

Members also expressed that the Park and Ride should facilitate events and run on Sundays and later in the evening especially during the Summer months.

The Chair once again thanked the Regeneration Manager, Events Co-ordinator and the Tourism and Conference Officer for their attendance and the information they had provided which had ensured a very informative meeting.

Meeting terminated 6.45 p.m.

Draft Report

Economic Scrutiny Panel

Review of Scrutiny of Tourism

1. Background

- 1.1 The Economic Scrutiny Panel carried out the original scrutiny of Tourism between September 2006 and January 2007.
- 1.2 The Panel were concerned that they had not received feedback on the recommendations that had been adopted by Cabinet June 2007.
- 1.3 Therefore the emphasis of the review was to focus on the recommendations and ascertain their impact.

2. Findings

- 2.1 The Panel decided that they would invite the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture, the Head of Cultural Services, the 2020 Vision Regeneration Manager, the Tourism and Conference Officer and the Events Co-ordinator to attend panel meetings.
- 2.2 The Panel were advised that information boards were used at the Park and Ride and on the buses. Issues regarding the lack of information available at the Railway Station were being investigated. Members were concerned with transport in and out of the city, there are a lack of trains stopping at Durham and were concerned that bus timetables were not adapted for large scale events.
- 2.3 It is planned to move the coach drop off point from the Market Place Steps to Walkergate opposite the bottom of Millennium Place steps and lift. This will be easier for visitors and they will be able to use the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) for maps of the city, places to visit etc.
- 2.4 Members had enquired whether it would be possible to divert the Cathedral bus or the Park and Ride buses to places of interest, but were informed that it was unlikely that the buses would be able to divert their routes.
- 2.5 Members were advised that the City had a good relationship with partners and the World Heritage site pulls all the partners together. There was joined up working with partners, this was particularly good knowing of events that partners had planned.
- 2.6 The Panel were advised that Durham City Vision were working on online information of events. The TIC and City Info Centres would be able to advise visitors and residents of events.
- 2.7 There were concerns of the numbers of empty shop units in the City and the imminent closure of Waitrose in the Gates. The Head of Cultural Services advised that retail experience in the City should match the heritage experience.
- 2.8 A Town Hall Manager was now in place and the Panel was advised that tours of the Town Hall would take place; a souvenir facility would not be available in the Town Hall, if patrons wished to purchase souvenirs this could be done at the TIC.
- 2.9 The new Events team had had a positive affect on attracting funding for events. Funding has been secured from The Arts Council and Culture 10. Positive feedback is being received from funders who are very interested in supporting Durham Mystery Plays.

- 2.10 It was suggested by Members that the Park and Ride should review its operating hours during Summer months to include Sundays and later into the evenings.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That the New Unitary Authority review the operating hours of the park and ride during the Summer months to include Sundays and to extend the cut off period to later in the evening.
- 3.2 That the work of the 2020 Vision, Tourism and Events teams be commended to the New Unitary Authority asking that they continue with the good work that has been established.
- 3.3 That the Events, Tourism and 2020 Vision teams are congratulated on their efforts.