

Minutes

Economic Scrutiny Panel

21<sup>st</sup> November, 2006, Town Hall

**Present:** Councillors: Hopgood (in the Chair), Colledge, Cowper, Cummings, Graham, Pape, Shaw, Simmons and Simpson

**Also Present:** Councillors: Gibbon, Hepplewhite, Kellett, McDonnell, Marsden, Moderate and Robinson;  
Mr Colin Wilkes, Managing Director Durham Markets Company & Director of Durham City Forum, Mr Martin Boulton Tourism & Conference Manager, Durham City Council, Councillor Norman Wade Chair of Overview & Scrutiny at Durham County Council and Mr Feisal Jassat Head of Overview & Scrutiny at Durham County Council

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Stoddart.

**2. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2006 were agreed as a correct record.

**3. Scrutiny of Tourism**

The Tourism and Conference Manager distributed data looking at the economic impact of tourism on the Heritage Group of Cities which includes Durham City. The statistics had been received since the last meeting but related to 2004, the source of the data was taken from the Cambridge model or the STEAM model (**Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Model**) destinations follow one of the models for compiling statistics. A copy of the statistics can be found at Appendix A.

The Tourism & Conference Manager went through the figures and took questions from Members. Members were concerned at the length of time taken to compile the figures.

Mr Colin Wilkes, Managing Director of Durham Markets Company and a Director of Durham City Forum gave the Panel a business perspective on tourism. Mr Wilkes informed the Panel that the retail trade in the City was at very low ebb largely due to the out of town retail centres at The Arnison Centre at Pity Me and Durham City Retail Park at Dragonville. The retail offer in Durham City is poor but retailers will not come into the City until the footfall is higher. From a trader's point of view there is no difference whether the customer is a visitor for a day, a week or a local person. Mr Wilkes said he thought that the Park and Ride was working well, however he mentioned that invariably coach tours did stop in Durham at 9.00am on a Sunday Morning and left at 11.00am before the public lavatories opened not to mention the shops.

Councillor Gibbon advised Members the Durham City has never been a 'shopping centre' and that there is more to Durham than the Castle and Cathedral. Details of attractions at outlying areas should be communicated to visitors.

Councillor Moderate commented that out of town shopping is 'slaughtering' city centres, that traders in Newcastle had the problem of the Metrocentre on their doorstep. Councillor Moderate mentioned unique spectacles that the City has to offer, civic services, Town Hall and the riverbanks were all underused and abused.

County Councillor Wade suggested that there were many attractions in Durham County from first class cricket at Chester le Street to Parachute jumping to riverside walks. Durham City centre could be used as a base for visitors to see the area and visit the local attractions.

Councillor Pape mentioned that as the railway station and the park and ride are all in the district then the district should take the lead and ensure that all activities are well advertised and communicated. Also that signage is accurate. Councillor Pape asked Mr Wilkes if there were any successful retailers within the City centre.

Mr Wilkes said that there were very few and that those that were successful were usually coffee shops. Major retailers such as Boots, Next and Marks and Spencer, had outlets out of town and in his opinion speciality shops were what was needed.

Councillor Hepplewhite suggested that the City was dirty, tatty and poorly maintained; it seemed that Durham had no character. Perhaps if Durham had more street theatre, mystery plays and more involvement from the university students this would help to raise the profile for visitors.

Councillor Pape reminded Members that recently Durham City won an award for the cleanest small city.

County Councillor Wade suggested that if we have to work together now so that we don't lose out to the bigger cities of Sunderland and Newcastle.

Councillor Moderate suggested that shop rents and rates should be in correlation to demand.

Mr Wilkes informed the panel that in the shopping centres the rents are £100.00 per square foot, obviously this drives up the rents of other available lets.

**Note:** Councillors McDonnell & Robinson left the meeting at 6.10 p.m.

Members discussed the problems with signage and made suggestions on how it could be improved by giving gradients and time scales as to how long it would take to get from one area to another.

The Tourism and Conference Manager agreed that specialised shops would make a difference, but that they could not be sustained by visitors alone. Levels of attractiveness have to be sought first then this can be built upon. Problems with signage are currently being addressed by signage consultants.

**Note:** Councillors Cowper & Kellett left the meeting at 6.30 p.m.

4. **Report of the Review of Economic Analysis – Incentives to Small Business**

The Panel agreed the report of the review of the Economic Analysis to go to the next meeting of Scrutiny Committee scheduled to take place Monday, 18<sup>th</sup> December, 2006.

5. Any Other Business

The Chair informed Members that Leisure Services 5 Year Plan was overdue a review and that this would be carried out at the December meeting where it would be arranged for the Leisure Services Manager to be in attendance.

Meeting terminated 6.35 p.m.

## **Evaluation of Scrutiny of Tourism**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 Economic Scrutiny Panel was tasked with scrutinising Tourism in the City of Durham (encompassing the City centre and the surrounding areas). The Panel requested information from the Head of Cultural Services and the Tourism & Conference Manager as well as information from the Council's partners – Durham County Council and One North East.
- 1.2 The Castle and Cathedral is a World Heritage site – Durham City has a lot of visitors passing through or day visitors, this type of tourism should be expanded to boost the district economy.
- 1.3 The Panel wished to investigate whether tourism in Durham could be boosted to make the most of the assets available.

### **2. Aims & Objectives**

2.1 It was the objective of the Panel to discover the following:-

- To clarify what strategies are in place and whether improvements can be made
- To establish that current marketing strategies are correct for their purpose.
- The value of tourism in Durham City district
- To identify strengths and weaknesses of tourism in Durham
- To increase opportunities
- To limit and manage threats
- How Business in the district support tourism
- How Durham City Council can support business'

### **3. Findings**

- 3.1 The Head of Cultural Services and the Tourism and Conference Manager attended several of the Panel meetings and advised the Panel on the current situation. They gave background information on tourism and explained how its profile has been raised over the past twenty years. Tourism generates an estimated £92 million to Durham City's economy, it is important to build on this, but competition is extremely challenging therefore Durham City has to give something unique.
- 3.2 Over recent years tourism has come to the fore and with advances in technology it is possible to book a visit and accommodation online via the internet, therefore the boundaries are global. Instant bookings and fast technology makes competition very tough, therefore communication to visitors is very important.
- 3.3 Melanie Sensicle, Chief Executive of Durham Area Tourism Partnership outlined the position and the way forward in tourism for the region. When people buy a holiday whether short or long they are being into an experience. They will take away with them memories and experiences of their visit therefore it is vital that the experience is a good one.

- 3.4 Members expressed concern about the methods used to market and communicate various places and activities to visitors, also that marketing methods had not been used to their full potential.
- 3.5 Members also were concerned with problems with transport links due to the cancellation of buses and the reduced numbers of trains that stop at Durham.
- 3.6 Mr Tom Keating, an independent Blue Badge Tourist Guide attended a Panel meeting and made observations regarding tourism in Durham City. Mr Keating mentioned poor signage of the Tourist Information Centre and of problems with finding attractions, such as the Botanical Gardens, the Oriental Museum and Crook Hall. Mr Keating suggested utilising both the Cathedral bus and the Park and Ride buses to take visitors to these places during the main visitor season.
- 3.7 The Christian Heritage Trail was another issue brought to the attention of the Panel, when visitors are on the Christian Heritage Trail obviously they visit Durham Cathedral and possibly the Church of St Margaret of Antioch but, getting to Churches such as St Lawrence's Church at Pitlington, St. Helen's at Kelloe can prove difficult if no information is available on which bus to get, where to get it, up to date timetables, where to get off the bus and how to get there when you have got off the bus.
- 3.8 Once the development at Walkergate is completed then new signage will be put in place, also visitors who park at Walkergate or the coach park will walk up to Millennium Place and directly passed the Tourist Information Centre. This will give visitors the opportunity to collect information on the attractions in and around the City.
- 3.9 Mr Colin Wilkes, Managing Director of Durham Market Company outlined tourism from a business perspective and advised that the footfall of customers had dropped which could be related to the current out of town shopping outlets at Pity Me and Dragonville and the levels of rents and rates in the City. Specialised shops would be the way to go but levels of rents and rates are very high, thus making the situation circular.
- 3.10 The Tourism and Conference Manager brought to Members attention figures recently received from Heritage Cities Group and compiled by STEAM (**S**carborough **T**ourism **E**conomic **A**ctivity **M**odel). These figures can be found at Appendix A.

#### **4. Recommendations**