

Minutes

Economic Scrutiny Panel

19<sup>th</sup> December, 2006, Town Hall

**Present:** Councillors: Hoggood (in the Chair), Colledge, Pape, Rochford, Shaw, Simmons and Simpson.

**Also Present:** Councillors: Howarth, Kellett & Marsden

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Cowper, Cummings, Gill, Graham & Stoddart

**2. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2006 were agreed as a correct record. The Chair informed Members that the minutes of the last meeting read that a review of Leisure Services would take place at this meeting but unfortunately this was not possible. The review would now take place at the February meeting.

**3. Scrutiny of Tourism**

The Panel agreed the Evaluation of the Scrutiny of Tourism and discussed what recommendations they would hope to come out of the Scrutiny.

a). The Panel asked for strategy updates on a tri-monthly basis

b). That a review of the topic be carried out in 6 months

c). That work continue to strengthen partnerships with

County Council

- Park & Ride

- Cathedral Bus

Rail provider

Durham Area Tourism Partnership

Dean & Chapter

University

Marketing

Durham City Arts

Tour Operators

d). Signage

e). The City Centre Co-ordinator position is a new, review after 6 months what the City has to offer.

f). Specialist brochures and web site covering the City of Durham District and the wider areas.

g). That marketing opportunities in accommodation outlets are taken

h). That festivals and events in the district are identified, supported and publicised.

i). That a stocktake of attractions is carried out.

Meeting terminated at 5.55pm

**Draft Report of Economic Scrutiny Panel  
Scrutiny of Tourism in the City of Durham**

**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**

- 4.1 That the panel receive updates on tourism strategies on a three month basis
- 4.2 That the panel review the scrutiny of tourism in six months.
- 4.3 That the Tourist section continues to work with partners to enhance the provision of tourism in the City of Durham district.
  - Make better use of the information stands at the Park & Ride
  - To encourage the expansion of the Cathedral bus service route to take in attractions such as Crook Hall and the Botanic Gardens
  - To work with the current rail provider in order to display marketing literature and uniform signage
  - Continue to work with Durham Area Tourism Partnership
  - Continue to work closely with University of Durham and Dean and Chapter to encourage people to visit the district.

- To work closely with Durham City Arts, Durham City Forum and Durham Markets Company with the common goal of encouraging visitors to attend festivals in the City.
- To establish links with Tour Operators and develop Christian Heritage Trails visiting local churches of interest as well as Durham Cathedral.

- 4.4 To ensure that the signage in the City is uniform, correct multi lingual and gives an approximate distance.
- 4.5 When the City Centre Co-ordinator has been in post 6 months check to ensure that the City is making the most of what it has to offer visitors.
- 4.6 To market specialist brochures of district attractions and to make this available in hard copy and on the website. To develop the idea of the attractions within the district as a bicycle wheel with the City Centre as the centre and the various district attractions to appear as spokes of the wheel.
- 4.7 To liaise with hotels in the district to ascertain the types of accommodation on offer and other facilities provided by the hotel. To ensure that hotels display relevant and update information relating to the district attractions, to pursue the conference circuit marketing.
- 4.8 To liaise with various partners especially Durham City Forum to market festivals and perhaps increase the length of the Christmas and Summer festivals. To encourage the marketing of the Durham Miners' Gala on a larger scale and the possibility of a Mining Heritage Centre. To market the many walks in the district, the Necklace Park, Crowtrees Walk, Ghost Walks in the City Centre.
- 4.9 Members to take part in a stock-take exercise – for each member to identify an attraction or place of interest in their ward.
- 4.10 To fully support the suggestion of a unique shopping experience in Durham City and to undertake a review of the business rate criteria within the district, to entice retailers into the area.