

**Minutes**

**Economic Scrutiny Panel**

**19<sup>th</sup> March 2008, Newton Hall Community Centre**

**Present:** Councillor Hopgood (in the Chair) and Councillors, Colledge, Guy, Kelly, Marsden and Simmons

**Also Present:** Councillors: Kellett and Moderate

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Plews and Stoddart

**2. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2008 were agreed as a true record.

**3. Draft Report – Review of Leisure Services**

Members discussed the draft report and decided that the following recommendations be added to the report:-

- That the New Unitary Authority continues to support and maintain a minimum standard as set by Durham City Council.
- That the Panel requests that the New Unitary Authority gives support to villages and small communities aid with leisure facilities.
- That by 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2009, Abbey Leisure Centre is in the same category as the other leisure centres regarding pricing.

Members requested that the draft report come back to the Panel at the next meeting.

**4. Any Other Business**

The Chair advised the Panel that following a meeting with the Portfolio Holder for Communities the report on CCTV would require amendments to be made to the recommendations. Appendix A of the report has seven points as the report stands at the moment. Points 4 and 6 have been tried and failed therefore they cannot be supported by the Council. Point 7 (reviewing staffing levels) cannot be supported by the Council due to Health and Safety reasons. Therefore recommendation 1 should be amended to read that Appendix A, points 1,2,3, & 5, are supported by the City Council.

The Panel agreed these changes to be made and an amended report be circulated under separate cover at the Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The next meeting the Panel will consider the Review of Leisure Services 5 Year Plan draft report and start the review of Tourism.

Meeting terminated at 5.50 p.m.



**Economic Scrutiny Panel**

**Draft Review of Scrutiny of Leisure Services – 5 Year Plan**

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Original Scrutiny was carried out during the winter of 2005/06 and was reported to Cabinet March 2006 with a recommendation that a review should be carried out after a period of six months had elapsed.
- 1.2 However, the review was carried out in February, 2007 where it was recommended that a further review would be carried out in February, 2008.

**2. Aims & Objectives**

- 2.1 At the original scrutiny the Panel had decided that the topic would be scrutinised in four sections; Stock Take; How we work with Young People; Exercise Referrals and Accessibility.
- 2.2 The Senior Leisure Development Officer once again attended the review meeting and presented information to the Panel on the current position of the service.

**3. Findings**

- 3.1 A question from Councillor Moderate relating to the difference between the fees for Membership to Leisure Centres, i.e. Abbey Leisure Centre in comparison to the other Centres. This question had been raised at the Scrutiny Committee held 7<sup>th</sup> February 2008. This question was referred to the Economic Scrutiny Panel, and a copy was attached to the agenda papers and forward to Leisure Services in advance of the meeting.
- 3.2 The price differential was due to the fact that Abbey Leisure Centre offered enhanced facilities in comparison with the City of Durham's other Leisure Centres. These include larger overall capacity, extra equipment (generally newer and of a higher quality) and a Sauna and Steam facility. Results from a Customer Satisfaction Survey showed that the Sauna and Steam facility was a major factor people considered when joining.
- 3.3 Whilst there is a desire to equalise the fees across all of the Leisure Facilities, it would need to be in tandem with works to bring all the facilities to the same standard of provision.
- 3.4 It was noted by some Members that Abbey Leisure Centre did have enhanced facilities in comparison to the other Centres, and understood the original reasons for the price differential.
- 3.5 A point was raised that if all the facilities offered different levels of provision, should each Centre have its own price structure. Members were informed that many gym members use more than one facility i.e. an individual may wish to use a centre near to the place of work on a lunchtime, but use a facility closer to home on an evening.
- 3.6 If each Centre had an individual fee schedule, then this flexibility (an advantage that the City of Durham facilities have over the private sector and a major selling point for memberships) would be prevented. If a person wished to use Abbey Leisure Centre and the other Centres, they would need to pay the higher fee.
- 3.7 It was also noted that the construction of Abbey Leisure Centre was paid for by "Community Gain" rather than directly from taxpayers, and therefore should the gain for the Community not be to have the facility priced equally with other Centres. Therefore, suggested that would it not be a fairer system to have a standard fee schedule for "core services" and then services specific to each centre be charged accordingly.
- 3.8 There is still a desire to equalise prices across all the Leisure Centres (except the new Freemans Quay Leisure Centre, which will have its Fitness Suite operated by a private company, Competition Line) and therefore works would be continuing to move towards this.

Also, it was again noted that to reflect the price differential Abbey Leisure Centre offered a better membership package compared to other local facilities. Due to the ongoing process of Local Government Review (LGR), there cannot be a definitive timescale attached to the process of equalising fees.

- 3.9 Members wondered whether there was a possibility of having a price freeze on the Passport for Leisure scheme for older people, as these fees have increase and this may affect the take up of the scheme. There were currently no plans for such a freeze. However, the “Healthy Horizons” scheme for the over 55 year olds has received £180,000 to continue class provision in the community. Funding received through the Durham Primary Care Trust allows for a substantially lower charge than the standard activity fee in the centres so this is an alternative option for that age group.

#### **4. Recommendations**

- 4.1 That the New Unitary Authority continues to support and maintain a minimum standard as set by Durham City Council.
- 4.2 That the Panel requests that the New Unitary Authority gives support to villages and small communities aid with leisure facilities.
- 4.3 That by 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2009, Abbey Leisure Centre is in the same category as the other leisure centres regarding pricing.

## **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, however, it should be noted that when compared with similar Cities £92 million is a low figure. 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 buying into an experience. People 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 Crookhall. 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 pass 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 circuitous.
- 3.10 The Tourism and Conference Manager brought to Members attention figures recently received from Heritage Cities Group and compiled by STEAM.

#### **4. Recommendations**

A response from the Portfolio Holder for Culture & Leisure can be found at Appendix A.

- 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 Crookhall, Botanic Gardens, Gulbenkian Museum etc.
  - 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 Durham University 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. It is recommended to ensure that hotels display relevant and update information relating to the district attractions and 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. Encourage the development of children's activities such as concerts, plays and festivals.
- 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.



### 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.

The Panel wished to investigate whether tourism in Durham could be boosted to make the most of the assets available.

#### 2. Recommendations

The Panel recognised the challenges facing Durham City's Tourism Service in an increasingly competitive environment and made a number of recommendations. A Response and Progress Report on measures taken to address these recommendations (given in italics), in order to maintain and improve the service, is given below:

- *That the Tourist section continues to work with partners to enhance the provision of tourism in the City of Durham district.*

Since the establishment of the CDTP, the Tourism Service has worked closely with its staff to ensure that the time and effort invested in setting up the organisation pays dividends to the city. This has already proved to be the case:

- *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 Crookhall, Botanic Gardens, Gulbenkian Museum etc.*
- *To work with the current rail provider in order to display marketing literature and uniform signage*
- *Continue to work with Durham Area Tourism Partnership.*

One of the difficulties experienced by the Tourism Service was the inability to provide information and maps in sufficient quantities to satisfy the demand from visitors (some 3.7m. per annum), and to supply new outlets such as the Park and Ride sites. By working with the County Durham Tourism Partnership a new Durham City Pocket Guide has been produced which includes a city map, and has been printed in a quantity of half a million. This will enable widespread distribution, including Park and Ride sites and the Railway Station. Work is ongoing with the station to enhance our presence there, as part of the refurbishment.

- *Continue to work closely with Durham University and Dean and Chapter to encourage people to visit the district.*

Discussions are underway with Durham City Vision partners, to explore opportunities for a World Heritage Site Visitor Centre on Palace Green. This would provide a focus for the site, encourage exploration of the city centre and beyond, and link with the Tourist Information Centre in Millennium Place.

- *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.*

Through the Durham City Vision, the Tourism Service has established an Events Team of an Events Co-ordinator and Events Support Officer to work with DCV partners and all other relevant bodies to improve the quality of events, create new ones, and to raise the profile of the City. An Events Toolkit will be provided on-line for potential organisers, and an events licensing policy for the city centre will be drawn up to encourage an increased level of high-quality activity.

- *To establish links with Tour Operators and develop Christian Heritage Trails visiting local churches of interest as well as Durham Cathedral.*

The Tourism Service works closely with tour operators and hosts occasional familiarisation visits. Resulting directly from this activity, the City's efforts were recently recognised by Group Organiser Magazine in its annual awards. Durham City was a finalist in the 'Group-Friendly Destination' category (won by Blackpool), St Aidan's was voted best University Accommodation for groups, and Beamish was Best Large Attraction.

- *To ensure that the signage in the City is uniform, correct multi lingual and gives an approximate distance.*

Durham City Vision has responded to concerns about signage, expressed by visitors in the satisfaction surveys conducted by the Tourist Information Centre, by commissioning a full-scale report from the specialist consultants Placemarque. Their findings and recommended signage strategy are due to be announced in September 2007.

- *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.*

The Co-ordinator is a member of the Durham City Vision Executive and meets regularly with the Events Team.

- *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.*

Now that the Durham City pocket guide has been produced, work is underway to produce supporting themed brochures, which will draw attention to attractions across the district. The first of these will feature gardens, parks, nature trails etc. They will form part of a national marketing campaign to be undertaken by the County Durham Tourism Partnership this year on themes such as Hidden Gems, Durham City Breaks etc.

- *To liaise with hotels in the district to ascertain the types of accommodation on offer and other facilities provided by the hotel. It is recommended to ensure that hotels display relevant and update information relating to the district attractions and to pursue the conference circuit marketing.*

This work is ongoing with hotels. Conference marketing is now undertaken on behalf of the City by Event Durham the University's conference office, which has recently been voted the UK's best conference office.

- *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. Encourage the development of children's activities such as concerts, plays and festivals.*

See above, on Events and Publications.

- *Members to take part in a stock-take exercise – for each member to identify an attraction or place of interest in their ward.*

Suggestions welcomed for potential attractions to be featured.

- *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.*

The Durham City Vision is to commission a report on distinctive shopping for the city, to attract specialist retailers and to improve the shopping appeal for visitors.