

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Special Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2 - County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 15 January 2019 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor E Adam (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors O Milburn, D Bell, L Brown, J Carr, J Clark, R Crute, D Hicks, C Kay, R Manchester, C Martin, A Patterson, A Simpson and P Sexton

Co-opted Members:

Mr T Bolton and Mrs P Holding

Also Present:

Councillor A Batey and J Clare

Mrs R Morris – Co-opted Member of Economy and Enterprise OSC

Mrs T Pemberton – Member of the Rail Heritage Steering Board and Chair of the Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway

The Chairman welcomed Members of the Economy Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Mrs T Pemberton to the meeting.

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Avery, A Gardner, P Howell and M Wilson.

2 Substitute Members

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

4 Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

5 The Heritage Coast and the Tourism Offer - Progress Update:

Members considered the joint report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that provided Members with details of progress made in relation to projects on the Heritage Coast and work undertaken to promote it as a tourism destination (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Mr Benson, Principal Heritage Coast Officer and Ms Gorman, Managing Director, Visit County Durham were in attendance to present the report and deliver their presentation (for copy of slides, see file of minutes).

The Chairman thanked the Principal Heritage Coast Officer for his presentation and asked Members for questions.

Mr Bolton commented that there are a number of good projects taking place on the coast and asked if there are any further plans to increase visitor awareness of what the coast has to offer such as the wide variety of flora and fauna.

The Principal Heritage Coast Officer responded that they did not have any plans for a single large attraction such as an interpretation centre due to the costs involved however, via the Seascapes project they are looking to join existing attractions together. He continued that one aspect of the Seascapes project was interpretation through touch screen panels. In addition leaflets are available at various locations on the coast highlighting what is on offer.

Councillor Crute referred to Crimdon, a popular local attraction with a Little Tern nesting site and asked for an update in relation to the provision of a warden to patrol the site.

The Principal Heritage Coast Officer responded that they were using European funding for the little tern project and that would end in March 2019. The café proposal would look at the management of the whole site. There is the possibility of introducing car parking charges to create a revenue source or there may be other funding pots that could be accessed to fund a warden. The problem period is 2019 however, discussions are taking place with Hartlepool on the possibility of using volunteers to patrol the site.

Councillor Kay asked for clarification as to what was on offer at Crimdon.

The Principal Heritage Coast Officer responded that Crimdon has sandy beaches and dunes. It is a place of quiet recreation and a caravan site is located to the North of the beach. The café would provide toilets and detail of the history of Crimdon.

Councillor Clark referred to the visit to the Heritage Coast by the committee last year and commented that it was not well attended, but those members who did attend were very impressed by what they saw.

Councillor Batey indicated that she had attended the coastal visit last year and that Crimdon was a 'hidden gem' with a car parking facilities very close to the beach.

The Chair then invited Ms Gorman, Managing Director, Visit County Durham to deliver her presentation.

The Chairman thanked the Managing Director, Visit County Durham for her presentation and commented that there is a lot of work being undertaken to promote Durham's extensive tourism offer and that Visit County Durham are targeting the right people. The Chairman then asked Members for questions.

Mrs Morris made reference to paragraph 20 of the report and asked if the 1,638 employed in tourism, were these jobs sustainable and are new jobs on the coast continuing to be created and if so, what was the percentage.

The Managing Director, Visit County Durham responded that there had been a 3% increase in jobs on the Durham coast.

Mrs Morris then asked what was planned in terms of further marketing the coast.

The Managing Director, Visit County Durham responded that they would be targeting wildlife, flora and fauna, the unique qualities of the coast. It was highlighted that these areas of focus attracted a niche market and it was confirmed that the Visit County Durham marketing team are currently undertaking work to attract this niche market to the County. It was highlighted that a BBC journalist had recently done an article on Durham's Magnesium Landscape. Mrs Morris suggested that there was an opportunity to look at offering boat trips out into the North Sea to increase the tourism offer.

Councillor Kay referred to the water sports offer at Seaham and asked how it is currently advertised, was it marketed to attract new people or was the customer base already established. He continued that he is part of a kayak club and as far as he was aware the club had not received any promotional material in relation to the Water Sports centre.

The Managing Director, Visit County Durham responded that they did national marketing to attract people to stay overnight in the county and use the sports facilities available at Seaham.

The Head of Culture and Sports commented that for the last three years the Water Sports centre had been very much focused on establishing itself providing an opportunity for people to come and try the offer available. However, it is now moving forward and he confirmed that he would pick up the point of advertising the offer to local clubs.

Councillor Batey commented that Visit County Durham have a small number of staff to market the County as a tourism destination. She continued that at a recent Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board workshop it had been highlighted by members that there is a need to provide a map of the county showing the location of key tourist attractions in the county and traveling distances between those locations.

Councillor Clark referred to the importance of interpretation screens in making visitors aware of other attractions throughout the county. She continued that with the development of Horden Station, there are opportunities for bed and breakfast businesses to capitalise on this development. How do we ensure local businesses do capitalise.

The Managing Director, Visit County Durham responded that they have a visitor information network, which consisted of 19 businesses, spread across the County. They also produce county maps and have branded leaflet racks filled with Durham leaflets only,

that display everything on offer in the County. They also have staff in visitor locations who are provided with training. These locations are mystery shopped each year with the most recent survey showing 91% satisfaction. She noted the comments on Horden Station and would ensure that work was undertaken with local bed and breakfast establishments.

Mrs Holding indicated that not everyone wanted to stay in a hotel such as Seaham Hall and commented that there needs to be a mix of accommodation available on the coast.

The Managing Director, Visit County Durham responded that accommodation on the coast is a challenge and that further accommodation is required and that Visit County Durham is currently working with the Regeneration Team on an accommodation study which would be ready in April 2019. She continued that the study had identified gaps in accommodation at the Heritage Coast, Bishop Auckland, Seaham and Durham City.

Mr Bolton referred to the visioning and local attractions and asked as to how attractions are identified. He referred to St. Mary's Church at Seaham and St Andrew's at Dalton-le-Dale, which were beautiful but did not seem to feature very high in relation to marketing and promotion as a tourist destination.

The Managing Director, Visit County Durham responded that St Mary's Church featured on Visit County Durham's website and that they are currently working on the Northern Saint Trails which again will feature on Visit County Durham's website and will include St. Mary's church. She confirmed that Visit County Durham has a Destination Management Action Plan for 2016-2020, that sets out the vision and what was required to develop the vision. The plan covered the whole remit and was developed in consultation with industry partners and members and had been subject to extensive consultation, however they did not engage with the community on the plan but made assumptions on their behalf.

Mr Bolton indicated that people in Durham were proud of where they lived and would engage if provided with the opportunity to do so.

Councillor Clare asked for confirmation on the number of staff in Visit County Durham's marketing team.

The Managing Director, Visit County Durham indicated that they have 12 permanent staff and 2 casual and a marketing team of 4.

Resolved: (i) That the report and presentations be noted.

(ii) That Members be provided with a further update as part of the 2019/20 work programme.

6 Stockton and Darlington Railway Bicentenary Celebrations - Overview:

Members considered the joint report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that provided Members with an update of the programme of celebrations for the Stockton and Darlington Railway Bicentenary (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Mr Howell, Head of Culture and Sport was in attendance to present the report and deliver the presentation (for copy of slides, see file of minutes).

Following the presentation the Chairman commented that a lot of work has already been undertaken to develop proposals for the bicentenary celebration he then asked Members for their questions.

Councillor Kay referred to the 150th anniversary, which was celebrated in 1975 and had been held at Shildon and asked if the 200th bicentenary anniversary would be dispersed up and down the track or would the celebrations be located in one central place and venue.

The Head of Culture and Sport responded that discussions had centred around Darlington taking the role of the arrival place for the celebrations then Stockton would be the location for the engineering base and then the heritage and celebration base would be located at Locomotion however currently nothing has been finalised.

Councillor Kay then commented that in his opinion Stockton and Darlington Railway should be a World Heritage site. He then commented that there is a need to look at the cycling infrastructure, with work required on the final link from Shildon to Bishop Auckland to ensure that the celebrations are accessible to everyone including cyclists.

The Chairman commented that a previous meeting of the committee had looked at cycleways in the County and that a further progress update would be included in the committee's future work programme.

The Head of Culture and Sport responded that Durham County Council is currently undertaking work on the cycleways and walkways along the railway track. In relation to World Heritage status this has been discussed however it had been agreed that it was not the right time. It is proposed that World Heritage status will be pursued following 2025.

Councillor Milburn referred to other railway assets within the County, which could be tied into the celebration package such as the Causey Arch and asked if Visit County Durham would be looking at this.

The Head of Culture and Sport commented that other railway assets will be added into the total celebration offer.

The Chairman referred to the infrastructure and highlighted the need to ensure that there is the mix of accommodation and transport to meet the requirements of visitors attending the celebrations. The bicentenary will be a huge boost for the area however it is recognised that we are currently in the early stages of discussion.

The Head of Culture and Sport commented that the bicentenary celebrations will be an event of significance.

Councillor Batey referred to Beamish Museum and asked whether they had been approached to loan some of their artefacts to contribute to the celebration events.

The Head of Culture and Sport confirmed that discussions had taken place and that they were supporting the celebrations.

The Chair asked Mrs Pemberton as to whether she would like to make any comments to the committee. Mrs Pemberton commented that she had become involved in railway heritage when she became a Durham County Council member and that she was passionate about seeing steam restored to our railways. She continued that she is incredibly encouraged by the work undertaken by Durham County Council to date although there is more work to be undertaken.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Pemberton for all her work.

Resolved: That a further progress report be included in the 2019/20 work programme together with a tour of the Locomotion site.