

**Environment and Sustainable
Communities Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**



15 January 2019

**Heritage Coast and the tourism offer -
progress**

**Joint report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Director of Transformation and
Partnership and Ian Thompson, Corporate Director of Regeneration
and Local Services**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ESC OSC) with detail of progress made in relation to projects on the Heritage Coast and work undertaken to promote it as a tourism destination prior to a presentation by officers from the Regeneration and Local Services Service Grouping.

Executive summary

- 2 A special meeting of the ESC OSC was held in February 2018 focusing on providing Members with an overview of activity undertaken on the Heritage Coast giving examples of various projects and schemes, detail of the development of Seaham Marina and the work undertaken in the county to promote the area as a tourism destination.
- 3 In addition, Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee (E&E OSC) were also invited to the special meeting and to a ESC OSC visit held on the 29 March, 2018 to see 'first hand' the development activity undertaken at Crimdon, Nose's Point and Seaham Marina.
- 4 It was agreed at the meeting in February 2018 that the ESC OSC would include in its 2018/19 work programme a progress update session in relation to the further development of the Heritage Coast and how we

are continuing to promote it as a tourism destination. It was also agreed that members of the E&E OSC would be invited to attend this meeting.

- 5 Arrangements have been made for Niall Benson, Principal Heritage Coast Officer and Michelle Gorman, Managing Director, Visit County Durham to attend the meeting on the 15 January 2019 and deliver a presentation focusing on the promotion of the Heritage Coast and development of projects along the coast including detail of funding, opportunities and challenges. A copy of the presentation is attached as appendix 2.

Recommendations

- 6 That the Environment and Sustainable OSC and the Economy and Enterprise OSC consider and comment on the information provided in this report and presentation provided at the meeting.
- 7 That the Environment and Sustainable Communities OSC considers as to whether a further progress report should be included in its 2019/20 work programme.

Background

- 8 Heritage Coast status marks the Durham coastline as being one of the finest in England. With dramatic views along the coastline and out across the North Sea, it has unique qualities which come from its underlying geology, its natural vegetation and the influences of the sea. It offers immense variety from shallow bays and headlands with yellow limestone cliffs up to 30 metres high with occasional caves and stacks; the coastal slopes being home to a fabulous array of wild flowers, to magnesian limestone grasslands, coastal gills, sand dunes, rocky shores and kelp beds. The Heritage Coast has three designated bathing beaches at Seaham Hall, Seaham and Crimdon.

What has been done?

- 9 Extensive work has been undertaken on the Heritage Coast by DCC and partners including:
 - **Horden** –The coastal area has now been restored and the former industrial areas transformed into stunning coastal grasslands. The cliff faces are now an important habitat for the Northern Brown Argus butterfly and funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund has helped improve access with a series of new footpaths, artwork and interpretation.
 - **Crimdon** – This was once a thriving holiday destination for mining families from nearby villages during the 1920s and is now a destination for one of our rarest seabirds, the Little Tern. The Little

Tern visits Crimdon to breed each year from West Africa and whilst at Crimdon are protected by wardens and volunteers who provide talks during the breeding season to the public about the colony. Crimdon has a long sandy beach with a large car park that provides access to the England Coast Path and a direct link to the Hart to Haswell cycleway.

- **Nose's Point** – Is a headland owned and managed by DCC and was once the location of Dawdon Colliery. The site has now been reclaimed into a stunning gateway site to Durham Heritage Coast, with wildflower meadows restored, ponds created for wildlife, seating areas, artwork and interpretation that have been designed to reflect the heritage of the area. The England Coast Path runs through Nose's Point and there is car parking available.
- **Integration** – The Heritage Coast Partnership has an active working relationship with DCC Regeneration staff particularly for Seaham, Seaham Marina and Horden Station. The Partnership also supports the work of Visit County Durham. These relationships are based on our mutual interests and shaped by resources and individual priorities.
- **Management Plan** – The Partnership has developed a new Management Plan to guide its work for the next seven years. This is supported with an annual business plan that guides the actions of the project management team and provides a forward view for partners.

Other Activities and/or events at the Coast

- 10 With funding from the LEADER programme, work has been undertaken with the children in year 5 of the Ribbon Academy in Murton to produce a self-guided walk leaflet using ipad technology during fieldwork. Similarly, the Heritage Lottery Fund has supported the work of the charitable body John Muir Trust's Challenge activity which encourages the use, appreciation and confidence to use our outdoor environment by young people.
- 11 Working with Durham Wildlife Trust, three training days at Hawthorn meadows have taken place providing an opportunity to study its rich and diverse grasslands.
- 12 In addition as part of EU LEADER funding, a small cluster group of tourism related businesses was started in East Durham. This group however failed to become established following the completion of the project.

- 13 The Durham Coastal Footpath is an 11 mile walking route from Seaham to Crimdon aligned with the England Coast Path National Trail; with a route that straddles the magnesian limestone coastal grasslands supporting a vast array of wildflowers and insects. Its distinctive coastal denes incorporate some of the most natural woodland in north east England; providing a valuable habitat for mammals such as deer, foxes, badgers and bats.
- 14 The Heritage Coast Partnership has now established an outdoor activity festival in spring half term week. The 'Reach for the Beach' festival celebrates the outdoor environment and brings together over 30 partner bodies with around 50 separate activities over the week. In addition free family events are supported across the coast and feature Crimdon and Blackhall Rocks during the summer with Coasting at Crimdon a regular event together with Beach School events and rock pooling at Blackhall Rocks and Seaham.
- 15 For 2019, the Reach for the Beach festival will be rested as staff will help support the Seaham Food Festival.
- 16 One of the main aims of Visit County Durham (VCD) is to attract new visitors to the county through its marketing activity, VCD adopts a mixed approach to both online and offline marketing with the majority of marketing activity now undertaken online.
- 17 The significant landscape improvements and investment in the Durham Heritage Coast in recent years has increased its appeal as a visitor destination, and the coast is now a key component in the majority of VCD's thematic marketing campaigns.
- 18 The Durham Coast has strong tourism product which supports multiple themes such as walking, cycling, water sports, beach family fun, wildlife, stunning landscapes, and food and drink. VCD works closely with the Heritage Coast Partnership team to promote the offer to attract visitors to the county.
- 19 VCD's current Outdoors campaign started in October 2018 and will run until March 2019. The main campaign activity is a print and online package with Countryfile magazine which started with a double-page spread in the October 2018 edition, featuring the many tourism assets of the Durham Heritage Coast. Businesses offering competition prizes for the campaign are Seaton Lane Inn, Dalton Park and Seaham Harbour Marina.
- 20 Tourism product development and a partnership led approach to marketing has resulted in sustained economic growth for the coast, demonstrated by the 2017 STEAM results which show that 3.23m people visited the Durham Coast in 2017, up by 2% on 2016,

contributing £127.44m to the economy, up by 3% on 2016 and supporting 1,638 jobs, also up by 3% on 2016.

- 21 Coast Watch is a scheme where all those interested in the coast can get together with Durham Police, DCC and landowners along the coast to take action to reduce environmental crime, anti-social behaviour and vandalism. The scheme operates along the whole of the Durham Heritage Coast and covers the car parks, paths, the 'beach banks' and our nature reserves.
- 22 Beach litter is harmful to humans and wildlife and is costing local authorities in the UK an estimated £18 million in direct cleaning costs. Adopt-a-Beach and Marine Conservation Society (MCS) Beachwatch are coastal environmental initiatives organised by the MCS involving local individuals, groups and communities in caring for their coastal environment. In addition, the Beach Care Code includes the Beach Safety Code which tells you how you can be safe as well as how to look after our coast with a list of Do's and Don'ts.
- 23 The Heritage Coast Partnership continues to work with partners to improve the quality of the landscape, nature conservation interests and access to the coast. Recently Partnership support has been given to establish an active body to integrate the work of the Wear Rivers Trust, Environment Agency and others aiming to improve water quality, biodiversity and awareness of our coastal streams, extending the benefits of integrated working into our hinterland. This grouping is called the Coastal Streams Partnership.
- 24 Additionally, the Partnership have recently secured £247,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to develop a delivery plan for the whole magnesian limestone coast between the Tyne and the Tees for the coast and inshore waters. The full name of this project is the Tyne to Tees Shores and Seas, Seascape Partnership Project – shortened to 'SeaScapes'. This is the first project of its kind and if approved will bring a total of £5 million to be spent over the next six years on improving the natural, built and cultural heritage of the coast. It will also provide experience and evidence that will help shape how coasts and inshore areas are managed in the future.

Next Steps

- 25 SeaScapes £5 million project planning continues with the second round application being submitted in August 2019. There is then a six month approval process. If successful implementation will start early in 2020.
- 26 Following submission of an Expression of Interest for facilities at Crimdon to the Coastal Communities Fund, we have been invited to

submit a second round bid by 21st January. This totals around £1.5 million and will provide toilets, interpretative space, volunteer space and a café at Crimdon. If successful, implementation will start in late 2019.

- 27 The EU LIFE Little Tern project is now finished; this leaves a gap in warden funding for 2019 ahead SeaScapes or Coastal Community Fund support. We are exploring the potential of working with Hartlepool Borough Council on a joint approach to wardening North Sands that may include the Little Tern colony. However it is unlikely that any arrangement will be in place for the 2019 breeding season.
- 28 The Coastal Streams Partnership has two funding bids currently awaiting decision, totalling some £490,000. Both bids include significant staff resources that will enable that partnership to thrive, delivering significant water quality, educational and volunteering opportunities across the area. The overall aim is to assist in reducing the damaging impacts of water quality and litter on the coast. Decisions on these bids are expected by early Spring 2019.
- 29 Horden railway station is expected to be operational in 2021. This key investment will bring significant regeneration benefits to East Durham. We continue to support this investment and, as resources allow, we will work to maximise the environmental, social and economic benefits of this investment.
- 30 The Heritage Coast Partnership currently provides the secretariat for the Tyne to Tees England Coast Path Partnership. This now includes South Tyneside and Stockton Councils. The completion of the whole England Coast Path is due in 2020 and will provide the longest managed coastal trail in the world.
- 31 At a national level we are working with Natural England to support their Living Coast initiative that is set to ensure that the wider benefits from the provision of the England Coast Path are realised.
- 32 Bathing Water Quality assessments for 2019 for our three Bathing Water Beaches show that Seaham Hall is rated as Good and both Seaham and Crimdon remain as Excellent.
- 33 The Heritage Coast Partnership is the delivery mechanism for coastal access and mitigation measures that are required under Habitat Regulations Assessment. These developer-generated contributions arising from planning permissions will enhance the protection for our European Protected Sites. We work closely with Durham County Council's Ecology team who, through the planning process, control how these sums are invested.

Main implications

- 34 It can be seen that there are significant investment opportunities for the coast in the pipeline, however these are all subject to funder approvals and may or may not be realised. This means that in the short term there is a significant shortfall in projects to be delivered and a consequential reduction in available project management income and Heritage Coast team capacity. This will be managed as decisions on bids are provided.
- 35 The Heritage Coast Partnership works cross border with neighbouring authorities, police forces, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Destination Management Organisations. With further new connectivity provided by the England Coast Path and Horden Station, we expect an increased focus on the development and provision of coastal tourism products.

Conclusion

- 36 Overview and Scrutiny Members are currently aware of the work undertaken by both DCC and partners to develop the Heritage Coast and how it has been promoted as a tourism offer. At the January meeting members will be updated on progress made in relation to the current and future proposed projects and schemes and how the Heritage Coast is promoted as a tourism destination. The committee shall be requested to determine as to whether it wants to continue to monitor future progress by including a further update in their 2019/2020 work programme.

Background papers

- The Heritage Coast website
- Heritage Coast Management Plan 2018-2025
- Annual Heritage Coast Business Plan

Other useful documents

- None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable