

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP REPORT - TOURISM MARKETING ACTIVITY UNDERTAKEN BY VISIT COUNTY DURHAM  
REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS CONSIDERED BY CABINET ON 21 OCTOBER, 2015.**

Review Recommendation	Progress Report of Action taken to implement recommendation	Resib'ty	Timescale
<p><b>1) In relation to the partnership approach to marketing, VCD seeks to extend its work with partner destinations and the Durham Strategic Marketing Partnership using major events to attract out of region visitors to raise the profile of the county as a visitor destination.</b></p>	<p>Since the last update provided in June 2016, Visit County Durham has continued to focus on partnership marketing to capitalise on key events and developments, and to extend the reach of its own activity.</p> <p><u>Partner Destinations</u> Work with partner destinations has focussed on product development in order to capitalise on the Discover England Fund to help secure the county's future as a leading destination. The fund is a three-year £40million programme announced by Government in 2015, the aim of which is to deliver world-class tourism products, respond to consumer needs and market opportunities, and drive growth in international tourism which in turn will benefit the domestic market. The outcome will be new products that can be used in marketing activity to attract visitors.</p> <p>Visit County Durham submitted a successful application as part of the England's Heritage Cities consortium which utilises augmented reality to showcase our heritage offer to under 35's in the US. VCD is also a partner in three further current applications.</p> <p><u>Strategic Partners</u> The Strategic Partners group continues to work in partnership with Visit County Durham to collectively shape and match fund national marketing initiatives.</p>		<p>Ongoing</p>

Autumn 2016 saw the delivery of a national marketing campaign which promoted Durham as the perfect destination for lovers of the great outdoors, giving us the opportunity to showcase the county's stunning landscapes and outdoor experiences. One of the main elements of the campaign was an episode of the online series 'Ben Fogle's Great British Adventures', which VCD was able to commission with the support of strategic partners (Hamsterley Forest, Durham Heritage Coast Partnership). The film has received over 280,000 views to date. Campaign activity also included a commission with the high profile blogger the Bald Hiker who delivered three articles plus social media activity to over 780,000 followers, an e-newsletter to over 430,000 targeted consumers and media coverage with The Times, Cycling Weekly and Country Walking magazines.

The spring 2017 national marketing campaign, the theme of which is heritage, is currently being planned in conjunction with Beamish Museum, Durham Cathedral and Durham University, who have contributed cash match to enable an online content partnership with the Guardian to take place.

#### Travel Partners

Visit County Durham continues to work in partnership with travel organisations who represent key points of entry in to the county, including the Port of Tyne, Newcastle and Durham Tees Valley Airports, Virgin East Coast and TransPennine Express to identify opportunities to promote Durham through their activities, and to ensure VCD is aware of travel partner initiatives that would benefit our own work.

Key Events

As well as utilising Visit County Durham's marketing channels and activities to promote the county's key events, VCD's marketing strategy uses destination events (those with the potential to draw visitors from outside of the region) as hooks to promote the county in order to encourage longer / overnight stays. VCD also works with event organisers to secure destination messaging within their own marketing activity. For example, VCD has recently worked with the Durham Regatta, Bishop Auckland Food Festival and the Tour Series to develop 'Stay Longer' or 'About Durham' sections on the event websites.

Dedicated marketing plans were delivered during 2016 for the first season of Kynren and the Open Treasure development. Working closely with the teams at Eleven Arches and Durham Cathedral, activity included dedicated sections on thisisdurham.com, e-newsletters, social media and press work which included securing journalists for media visits.

Support plans for 2017 are in place for Kynren and Lumiere, and a new partnership with the Bishop Auckland Food Festival has been secured to strengthen the destination links and encourage longer stays.

Place Brand for Durham

Visit County Durham was tasked with evolving the successful destination brand 'this is Durham' in to a place brand to provide a platform to promote the county not only as a place to visit, but also to invest, live, work and study.

	<p>Working closely with Business Durham, the theme of light emerged as being a strength for the county and something that would differentiate Durham from other destinations.</p> <p>Durham Place of Light was soft launched during Lumiere 2015, with the website and marketing tools continuing to be developed. In November 2016 a regional launch took place at Durham Cathedral, followed by a national launch at the House of Commons in February 2017. The events were attended by business leaders, industry partners, councillors, MPs and invited guests who were introduced to the brand, shown the stunning Place of Light video and met representatives from some of the stories which help to shine a light on the county.</p> <p>The response to Durham Place of Light has been very positive, and ambassadors, who will help to spread the brand messages, have already been secured from all sectors.</p> <p>A Place Brand Marketing Strategy is currently being finalised to outline next steps, and research has been undertaken to ascertain current perceptions so that activity can be targeted and the impact of the brand and its activities can be evaluated over time.</p>		
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<p><b>2). That VCD continues to develop and redesign the 'thisisdurham.com' website and ensure that it remains responsive to the increasing and changing information demands resulting from developments in social media applications.</b></p>	<p>thisisdurham.com was relaunched in August 2016 following a full redesign which also saw the inclusion of a number of new technology functions. Social media feeds and video are integrated across the site to provide rich content for web users, and the site is also fully responsive - which is essential as 63% of traffic to thisisdurham.com is from mobile devices. Commercial elements were also built in to the site to release its income potential.</p> <p>New web sections were launched for Kynren and Open Treasure, with Family Fun, Golf and Wedding currently in development.</p> <p>Web traffic is performing well, with monthly unique visits exceeding 100,000 on three occasions during 2016, with the highest ever monthly figure (103,317) achieved in July. The volume of 2016-17 unique users is 12.6% higher than 2015-16, and we are on target to achieve 1 million.</p> <p>Research is also currently underway to ascertain the conversion figure for thisisdurham.com, as well as the additional spend the site generates.</p>		Ongoing

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<p><b>3) That VCD continues to research and identify national marketing campaign opportunities which benefit partners within the DSMP and promote County Durham as a tourism destination.</b></p>	<p>Although the national landscape has now changed, with VisitEngland no longer running domestic marketing campaigns that destinations can participate in, Visit County Durham has continued to identify national marketing opportunities which benefit the destination and Strategic Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National marketing campaign, Autumn 2016 – the online series ‘Ben Fogle’s Great British Adventures’ was a country-wide project which destinations could buy in to</li> <li>- VCD has recently signed up to a national initiative with TripAdvisor which will see Durham receive an enhanced presence on the site, over which we will have editorial control</li> </ul>		Ongoing

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<p><b>4) VCD ensures that robust performance targets and monitoring procedures for all online and offline marketing activity are in place.</b></p>	<p>Visit County Durham has associated targets for all aspects of its marketing work, which are reviewed quarterly and reported annually:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The value of media coverage achieved</li> <li>- Number of media visits to the county secured</li> <li>- Unique visits to the website</li> <li>- Performance of e-newsletters</li> <li>- Volume of consumers added to the database</li> <li>- Volume of social media followers</li> </ul> <p>All campaigns are evaluated against their specific objectives, and activity reviewed in order to inform subsequent work.</p>		Ongoing

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<p><b>5) That the performance evaluation of the effectiveness of marketing activity undertaken in relation to the national marketing campaign is promoted and reported to the County Council as part of its performance management process.</b></p>	<p>Visit County Durham utilises a number of channels to communicate activity and results including RED Comms and member updates, and carry out tailored communications as appropriate.</p> <p>VCD also utilises Durham County Council corporate communication channels including Buzz magazine and the Intranet, which form part of a monthly corporate communications plan.</p> <p>Visit County Durham report on a quarterly basis against a number of RED Performance Indicators and Head of Service Plan Indicators.</p>		Ongoing

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<p><b>6) That VCD maximises all identified future marketing opportunities for 2015/16 including:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>The use of major events and developments at attractions in County Durham.</b></li> <li>○ <b>The Northern Futures Fund, a new source of funding which promotes northern destinations to overseas markets.</b></li> <li>○ <b>Championing as a future priority with the NECA the importance of the tourism related economy.</b></li> </ul>	<p><u>Use of Major Events and Developments</u> All major events and developments were fully utilised during 2015/16 in the promotion of the county.</p> <p>A dedicated marketing plan was delivered for Lumiere 2015, working in partnership with Artichoke, which also saw the relaunch of Visit County Durham's award-winning Virtual Lumiere app. Marketing plans were delivered for Kynren and Open Treasure, with VCD working closely with Eleven Arches and Durham Cathedral. Other destination events utilised in the promotion of the county included: Bishop Auckland Food Festival; Investec Test Match; Brass - Durham International Festival; Heritage Coast Festival; Durham Remembers; Shoes Pleasure &amp; Pain at The Bowes Museum; Durham Book Festival.</p> <p>Developments, including those at Killhope and Beamish Museum, were also utilised in Visit County Durham's marketing work.</p> <p><u>Northern Tourism Growth Fund</u> Visit County Durham was heavily involved in the £20m Northern Tourism Growth Fund programme, helping shape activity from the outset and becoming a lead destination delivering a key project for the programme. The fund became a main focus of VCD's marketing work during 2015/16 to ensure that the county achieved maximum benefit.</p> <p>Visit County Durham's role in activity was three fold: take part in all appropriate activities; encourage as many Durham businesses to take part as possible; ensure Durham was profiled in remaining appropriate activities.</p>		Ongoing

	<p>VCD took part in over 30 different activities including media visits, travel trade visits, travel trade events, campaign websites, itineraries and press receptions - raising the county's profile in the target overseas markets on a scale never seen before.</p> <p><b><u>NECA</u></b> As part of the Northern Tourism Alliance Visit County Durham works closely with colleagues to highlight the importance of the visitor economy in Durham and the wider region with NECA and the NELEP.</p>		
<b>Review Recommendation</b>	<b>Progress Report of Action taken to implement recommendation</b>	<b>Resib'ty</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
7).That a review of this report and progress against recommendations will be undertaken six months after the report is considered by Cabinet.	Complete		June 2016