

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 **Monday 12 February 2018 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor E Adam (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors L Brown, J Clare, J Clark, R Crute, A Gardner, P Howell, P Jopling, R Manchester, C Martin, A Patterson, A Simpson, P Sexton and M Wilson

Co-opted Members:

Mr T Bolton and Mr D Kinch

Also Present:

Councillors J Atkinson, A Batey, L Maddison and Mr T Batson

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors O Milburn, D Bell, J Carr and L Taylor.

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 - Overview

The Committee considered the joint report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that provided Members with background information on the Heritage Coast and work undertaken to promote it as a tourism destination prior to a presentation by officers from Regeneration and Local Services Service Grouping (for copy of report and slides of presentations, see file of minutes).

Visit County Durham

The Committee received a presentation from the Managing Director of Visit County Durham that highlighted the following points:-

- Introduction
- Destination Performance:
 - 19.25 million visitors in 2016 up 3% on the previous year
 - 93% day visitors, 7% staying visitors
 - Economic value £806m per annum up 2% on 2015
 - Food and drink and recreation main areas of expenditure
 - Mainly from the North East on a repeat visit, first time visitors are more likely to be national or international
 - Main age profile is over 45, visiting in couples
 - Main segments 'Country Loving Traditions' (48%), 'Fun in the Sun' (19%)
- Durham Coast Performance:
 - Economic value £120.7m in 2016 up by 3% on 2015
 - 3.16 million people visited Durham Coast in 2016 up by 3%
 - 94% day visitors, 6% staying visitors
 - 15% of expenditure in the county as a whole
 - 1.592 employed in tourism – directly and indirectly
 - 14% of overall tourism employment in the country
 - Food and drink sector made the biggest contribution
- Marketing the Coast - Social Media, Multi-Media, Email Marketing, Print Media and Direct Mail, Search, Website, Social Media, Video, Other Social Media, Public Relations, Blogs and Mobile
- Opportunities and Challenges

Mr T Bolton commented that he had looked at the Visit County Durham's website to see if it promoted the link to Lord Byron and asked if any promotional activity had been undertaken two years ago to promote the 200th anniversary of Lord Byron's marriage. He continued that if no promotion of the lord Byron link had been undertaken then it was a lost opportunity. He also referred to the need to promote the unique geology of the Durham coast line.

The Managing Director responded that they used the link to Lord Byron as a promotion but admitted that the 200th year anniversary was a missed opportunity. The Times supplement had a feature on the coast however, they did not promote the geology there is a need to make more of the geology of the coast in the future.

Councillor Jopling referred to the figures for visitor numbers and asked how many visitors were from abroad, other areas of the country and how many were local.

The Managing Director responded that the figures were unable to be broken down into that detail.

Councillor Jopling then referred to the accommodation currently available and commented that current hotel provision is expensive and that there is a lack of affordable accommodation for weekend visitors.

The Managing Director indicated that they promoted all types of accommodation on their website.

Mr D Kinch asked if the County had blue flag status for any of its beaches.

The Heritage Coast Officer responded that none of county Durham's beaches have blue flag status as County Durham does not have the funding to meet the requirements of the blue flag criteria it is very restrictive.

Mr D Kinch continued by asking as to whether any County Durham beaches have lifeguards.

The Heritage Coast Officer responded that none of County Durham beaches currently have lifeguards as there is no funding available.

Councillor Gardner referred to the cycling and walking routes and commented that currently there was no links with the East and West of the county and that a structure was needed to connect these routes.

The Managing Director responded that we currently have the Weardale Way and the Teesdale Way and that Visit County Durham promote the whole destination for walking and cycling.

Councillor Howell sought clarification if the figures were per calendar year or the municipal calendar year. The Managing Director confirmed that it was the calendar year.

Councillor Howell then asked about the performance in relation to economic value was up 3% and how did this compare to the rest of the country. The Managing Director advised that she would be able to provide the member with this information in due course.

Councillor Brown asked how the 2017 figures compared to 2016. The Managing Director responded that it was too soon to tell but the figures would be available May/June. Visit County Durham do speak to accommodation providers throughout the year and visitor attractions and they were reporting both good occupancy levels and visitor numbers.

Councillor Clare commented that following the loss of One North East the funding available for promotion had been cut significantly which had resulted in Visit County Durham having a very small budget to promote the county as a tourism destination and whilst recognising that blue flag beaches, walking and cycling were desirable the council were not responsible to provide many of these and it was about using available resources and making the most of what the County has to offer. He continued that it would be wrong to compare County Durham with North Yorkshire which have far more funding to spend on promotion. He asked if the number of visitors for 'Fun in the Sun' included day visitors. The Managing Director confirmed that the figures included day visitors.

Councillor Crute referred to the large disparity in day and staying visitors and sought clarification if they promoted local accommodation businesses and how far did they work with neighbouring local authorities and rail providers. He commented that the new rail link would address some issues.

The Managing Director responded that they promoted Durham as a destination for overnight accommodation under the 'stay a little longer' message. However there are challenges with accommodation and visitor attractions and used York as an example where you could get off the train and walk to 11 visitor attractions whereas Durham has a dispersed offer. The Tourism Management Plan identifies gaps in the current offer and Visit County Durham is working with other destinations including North Yorkshire, Cumbria, Northumberland and Scotland to address these gaps and get Durham a 'go to' destination.

Councillor Crute asked how they break down these barriers as people were not getting off the train at Durham.

The Managing Director advised Members that they were working with local businesses and the North East Tourism Alliance Group and further developing links with other authorities to promote hotels in the county for major tourist events for example the Tall Ships this is a joint promotion.

Councillor Atkinson sought clarification on how the visitor numbers were counted.

The Managing Director advised Members that the Scarborough Tourism Economic Assessment Model (STEAM) was used, which was a trend model which had been used since 2003.

Councillor Clark referred to Visit County Durham's website which currently had no reference to small accommodation provision and asked how often the website is refreshed and commented that she would like to see an increase in the promotion of smaller accommodation available within the whole of the county.

Councillor Maddison asked if they had links with the caravan club which produce a book of sites.

The Managing Director indicated that they worked with the caravan club nationally and that there were only two sites in County Durham, one in Durham City and one in Barnard Castle. Visit County Durham rely on businesses contacting them direct and then Visit County Durham will place them on their website, businesses need to agree to their information being placed on the website however she would look into the caravan club brochure and the possibility of more smaller caravan sites in the county being included.

Mr Batson commented that he was always asked as to whether Visit County Durham promotes Durham City (Durham) or County Durham and that this needed clarification. He indicated that Northumberland's model does not fit County Durham and that the Durham coast is magnificent and that we had the coast to coast cycle route and asked whether the coast or the countryside receives the larger share of funding.

The Managing Director responded that Visit County Durham represents the whole of the county and that the level of funding in relation to rural and coastal was balanced and that the coast was considered as rural under DEFRA's definition when it came to funding.

Councillor Jopling referred to Bishop Auckland's Food Festival and asked if there was anything similar in the rest of the county as huge numbers of visitors attend this tourism

event. It had taken several years to become popular and more however more still could be made of it and there was an opportunity to develop similar events in other areas of the county.

Seaham Marina

The Committee received a presentation from the Team Leader, Regeneration that highlighted the following points in relation to the Seaham Marina development:-

- Background
- Seaham Marina:
 - Regenerated from the North Dock and transformed into a modern marina with facilities and amenities to rival any across the North East
 - Facility offers first class business premises, visitor centre, viewing terrace, public toilet facilities, slipway and boat launch and a boatyard storage area
 - New dock gate installed that allows water to be retained within the dock at all times
 - Provides electric and water to cater for 96 boats on berthing and visitor pontoons
- Photographs shown of the site before and during site works
- Waterside Business Units - 12 units of 12 x 500 sq. ft.
- Coastal Communities Funding – Secured £1.74m to deliver a range of expansion plans:
 - Capital – Boatyard extension, fit-out and boat hoist, extension to pontoons to provide additional 19 berths, coastal/watersports centre, replacement fencing, access gates and improved height to Spiels wall
 - Revenue – Water Sports Development Officer and Water Sports Activity Instructor
 - Photographs shown of the Pontoons, Activity Centre and Water Sports
- Sports England Funding:
 - £149,532 successful funding application with Sports England to help develop the coastal activity/water sport centre
 - 19,429 attendances
 - Worked with Primary and Secondary School and local community groups
 - Delivered Sessions in Kayaking, Canoeing, Stand up paddle boarding, Climbing, Fitness Sessions, Boot Camp, Cycling, Orienteering, Walking and Water Safety
- Opportunities – Development of a programme of events/activities at the marina in association with other partners and further marketing of the Marina and Activity Centre and the opportunities presented by the ever developing Heritage Coast
- Recognition and Awards – RICS, RIBA, RTPI and Environmental Awards

The Chairman commented that it was interesting to see the amount of work and funding that had gone in to allow the Council to create what can be seen today.

Councillor Crute congratulated the Team responsible for the Seaham Marina Development which was a much needed regeneration scheme due to the closure of the three pits in the area. However, it is perceived within the county that there is an imbalance on the coast with a lot of funding going into Seaham, there is a need for development to attract tourists/visitors to the remaining Durham Coast to compliment the development at Seaham.

Councillor Howell endorsed the team work and asked how industry sat as part of the Seaham development.

The Team Leader, Regeneration responded that the development was a joint venture with the dock company who were very supportive of what they were wanting to achieve. The dock company had a warehouse and distribution facility and as a result of the development have the ability to move cargo easier due to the links with the A19. They have also gifted additional land for the further development of Seaham Marina.

Councillor Howell asked if the products brought into the docks were clean. The Team Leader, Regeneration responded that the products were not 100% clean, they had had some issues with coal dust however the dock company had worked with Durham County Council to resolve this issue.

Mr Bolton referred to the visitor centre being staffed by volunteers and that it was not always open and was quite constrained in terms of size and the amount of items on display. He also commented on the geology of the marina, He then referred to the docks which had been a thriving fishing port at one time however this seems to have disappeared and asked was there any plans to encourage the selling of fish from the local fishing industry.

The Regeneration Manager responded that they are trying to open up the visitor centre more and they were currently working to see if the opening hours could be extended. They were also looking at storage so that they could display more items. With regard to the geology of the marina they had regular visits from Newcastle and Durham University and were in the process of developing leaflets and signposts. Three commercial fishing boats still operated however there is not the capacity to increase the number of fishing boats operating on a commercial basis. There are plans this summer for a pop up seafood café in the form of a horse box.

Councillor Gardner referred to the 1 metre water level in the dock and commented that this was disappointing.

The Team Leader, Regeneration responded that they retain the water at a 1 meter level to ensure boats remained afloat at all times within the marina but they could take boats with a greater keel depth the extent of which was dependent upon tidal waters.

Councillor Sexton referred to the coast to coast cycle route and that there was no photo opportunity as evidence that you had completed the course. There was also little signage on the main coast to coast route and nothing to bring people into Chester-le-Street or Seaham and asked if the signage could be updated.

The Team Leader responded that work is ongoing regarding signage and that discussions are taking place to try and bring a triathlon to Seaham in the future. In addition the Regeneration Team is working with the Heritage Coast officer in relation to the Seascape Project and are in discussions concerning the development of Red Acre Point as a vantage point.

Councillor Manchester sought clarification on the benefits to the local economy of the Seaham Marina development.

The Team Leader, Regeneration responded that a snapshot of visitors are asked to complete a survey which shows on average that each visitor spends £10 per visit with 200,000 going to the Marina in 2017. The Local Authorities had contributed 700,000 to the Marina development.

Councillor Jopling referred to job creation and if it had been successful.

The Team Leader, Regeneration advised Members that 70 jobs had been created including apprenticeship opportunities however in the tourism sector generally the number of jobs created would be three fold.

Mr Batson referred to the amount of money used in land reclamation which achieved so little but the social value in this project was enormous and that local businesses selling fresh fish produce was ideal particularly as there is a good mix of fish restaurants and fish and chip shops.

The Team Leader, Regeneration advised that Seaham Hall bought some of the local catch and in the summer months cars were bumper to bumper trying to get into Seaham.

Mr Batson went on to ask if the Town Council was active in what was happening. The Team Leader, Regeneration indicated that they were proactive and had a comprehensive programme of events.

Councillor Maddison asked if the restaurants in Seaham also offered health options.

The Team Leader, Regeneration responded that East Coast Fitness had a unit, they had boot camps and work was taking place with local businesses looking at the possibility of healthy food options.

Our Heritage Coast

The Committee received a presentation from the Heritage Coast Officer that highlighted the following points:-

- Photographs of the Heritage Coast in 1992 and 2010
- Heritage Coast Objectives:
 - Preserve and enhance landscape quality
 - Access and Public Enjoyment
 - Nature Conservation
 - Education Opportunities
 - Greater Participation
 - Integrated Management
- Reach for the Beach Outdoor Festival – 28 May to 3 June 2018
- Management Plan and Annual Business Plan (to be published in March 2018)
- Partnership Structure
- Pictures of Crimdon in the 1930's – 1982 and now for nature and leisure
- Crimdon Challenges:
 - Key gateway site
 - Over 400,000 visitors per year

- No facilities – limits audience, family groups, repeat visits, limits use by schools and limits events
- High nature conservation value
- Key species – little tern 10% of UK breeding population
- Litter
- Currently:
 - Fencing for dune recovery and to control access
 - Colony will be fenced and wardened this breeding season
 - Enhanced signage
 - Scientific research
 - Final year of EU LIFE project
 - Facilities options produced
- Crimdon Facilities
 - Coastal communities fund
 - Using others experience
 - Four options produced and costed:
 - 40 seat café, toilets, volunteer space, interpretation space
 - Need to include whole site, events infrastructure
 - Currently £1.8 million, expect £2.8 million
 - Revenue
- Potential new build Crimdon café and staff facilities
- Tyne to Tees Shores and Seas – A Seascape Partnership
- Ambition:
 - Heritage – whether built, cultural or natural, will be better recorded, managed and in better condition
 - Coastal communities – better engaged with their rich heritage and can better access the amazing coast on their doorstep
 - £5 million over 6 years
 - Evidence base for future coastal and marine policy for England
- Build on:
 - North East Marine Planning process
 - Sunderland Tall Ships 2018
 - England Coast Path partnership
- Proposed Projects:
 - Hartlepool's high and low lights
 - Wreck, water and shore activities
 - Volunteer training and citizen science
 - Beach care and blue gym
 - Seascape stations
- Partners – The National Trust, Durham County Council, The Wildlife Trust, Northumbrian Water, Newcastle University, South Tyneside Council, Sunderland Council, Hartlepool Borough Council, North Eastern IFCA, Heritage Coast, Natural England, Roker Pier, Living History (North East), Environment Agency, East Durham Heritage Group, Groundwork NE, Marine Management Organisation, The Great British Coast, The National Lottery and Heritage Lottery Fund
- Transnational working Young People, Art and the Environment

Following the presentation the Chairman sought clarification of how often the Durham Heritage Coast website was updated as he could only find information up to 2016.

The Heritage Coast Officer responded that they tended to use facebook and twitter with the website used more as a register. He continued that there was a resources issue in keeping the website updated.

Mr T Bolton referred to the East Coast railway line and asked if consideration had been given to providing adult exercise equipment along the route.

The Heritage Coast Officer responded that funding had been concentrated on gateway sites with the new railway station at Horden, the restoration of the wages office at Easington Colliery with a café that overlooks the colliery site and the coast. He continued that work could be undertaken with health in relation to gym equipment however the installation of exercise equipment would have ongoing maintenance costs.

The Chairman commented that his parish council has installed adult exercise equipment which was meant to be vandal proof however the equipment had still been broken. He continued by asking about accessibility for the disabled.

The Heritage Coast Officer responded that they have well developed access for the disabled with key sites access friendly however what needs to be produced is a leaflet for the disabled and that this was on their list to be produced and that they were working with the Local Access Forum on this. There was the possibility that they could do some promotion around the introduction of the Horden Park run which was coming shortly.

Councillor Crute referred to promotion and community engagement and that people needed to be aware of schemes and that they had an opportunity to input and develop schemes to ensure that coastal sites have what local people want.

The Heritage Coast Officer commented that in relation to Crimdon it is only at the funding bid stage. When funding is agreed that will be the time to engage local communities and local members, looking at various development options to ensure that any future development has had significant input from the local community.

Councillor Clark referred to the Durham Coast Half Marathon which was publicised by the National Trust and was facilitated by volunteers and that arrangements are being made to have Horden host a park run.

Mr Batson referred to the need for clean public toilets for visitors and that such facilities had be publicised together with good signage. He then congratulated the team on their long term vision.

The Chairman indicated that public toilets were closing due to lack of funding and referred to public toilets in Europe which were unmanned and cleaned themselves automatically. He also indicated that litter was an issue with facilities.

The Chairman advised members that there was a site visit to the Heritage Coast on the 29 March 2018, he then thanked officers for their presentations and asked members to agree the recommendations outlined in the report.

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

(ii) That a report providing detail of the further development of the Heritage Coast be included in the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committees work programme for 2018/19.