

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ADULT EDUCATION -
20th JANUARY 2010**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

REPORT ON THE VISITOR ECONOMY

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Select Committee on progress and achievements over the past 12 months in respect of the development of the borough's visitor economy and future planned developments within the borough.

Destination Management Partnerships (DMPs)

2. The West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy (2004) outlined Destination Management Partnerships (DMPs) as the 'preferred' delivery mechanism for destination management at a sub-regional level. Within the West Midlands, there are seven sub-regions, each having a Destination Management Partnership or equivalent organisation for the delivery of destination management and tourism marketing.
3. Within the Black Country, the Visit the Black Country partnership was established in November 2009 to undertake a focused programme of business support and marketing activity.
4. Dudley MBC is the lead authority for the partnership, with Black Country Consortium Ltd providing the secretariat function. Dudley MBC is also acting as the Accountable Body for the Advantage West Midlands funding (£150,000) which will support the delivery of the business plan from 1st April 2010 until 31st March 2011. This funding application is currently being assessed by Advantage West Midlands.
5. The Business Plan for the partnership was approved by the partnership Task Group in December 2009 and an action plan is now being delivered by partners, which includes Dudley MBC, Wolverhampton City Council and the Black Country Hoteliers Association.
6. The Business Plan focuses on 3 key areas
 - Business engagement and Quality
 - Marketing, product development and promoting excellence
 - Advocacy for the Black Country Visitor Economy

7. The partnership is currently chaired by the Chief Executive of Dudley Zoological Gardens, and supported by the Chief Executives/General Managers from Wolverhampton Racecourse and Novotel Wolverhampton, in addition to officers from Dudley MBC – the Chief Executive, the Assistant Director for Culture and Leisure and the Tourism Development Officer.

Dudley's Visitor Economy

8. The Visitor Economy has been recognised as having an important role in the renaissance of the Black Country, both through the 30 year vision and as identified in the Regional Spatial Strategy, the new role of Dudley town centre.
9. The main objectives for developing Dudley as a visitor destination are: -
 - encourage existing day visitors to become overnight visitors, therefore encouraging greater spend in the local economy
 - encourage more day visitors (and repeat visitors)
 - increase the number of visitors to Castle Hill from half a million to 1 million per annum.
10. In 2008, the visitor economy was worth in the region of £223 million to the boroughs economy and directly supported around 6100 jobs. We welcomed around 4.3million visitors, who come for either leisure or business, with around 300,000 staying overnight.
11. Although the number of visitors has slightly decreased since 2004 when our last Economic Impact Assessment was undertaken, the value of the visitor economy has increased by around £45million. From 2004, the average spend per visitor was £29.38, this has increased to £46.20 in 2008, therefore having a greater impact on the economy of the borough. Through this increased spend, the number of jobs supported by the visitor economy has also risen by nearly 2000.

Supporting Projects

12. In order for us to continue to develop our visitor economy, continuing investment is required in from both the public and the private sector. A number of projects, both from the public and private sectors are supporting the development of the visitor economy.

Ripples through Time - Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve

13. In September 2008, the Council received a Stage 1 pass for the Ripples through Time project. Over the past 12 months we developed the Stage 2 application and submitted this in August 2009. The project includes work to develop formal and informal learning on the site and to enhance the interpretation of this amazing sites geological and archaeological heritage while highlighting its importance for nature conservation. The HLF will contribute up to £711,000 to the overall project.

In December 2009, the Council received its Stage 2 pass from the Heritage Lottery Fund and work will begin on site in March/April 2010. The project will continue until 2013.

Stourbridge Glass Quarter

14. The Glass Quarter is a key visitor destination in the borough featuring attractions, glass studios and events that showcase the areas unique heritage and creative talent.
15. The Council is continuing to work with partners to promote the Glass Quarter as a visitor destination. A new website for the Glass Quarter will be launched during the Spring. The website will act as the portal site for the Glass Quarter and the attractions and businesses within it. It will also be used as the main marketing focus for the Glass Quarter.
16. The **International Festival of Glass** was established in 2004 to celebrate British Glass and in particular the glass heritage of Stourbridge, the International Festival of Glass (IFG) aims to re-establish Stourbridge and the West Midlands as a world centre for glassmaking. Plans are now progressing for the 2010 Festival which will take place 27-30 August.
17. The previous Visitor Economy report in 2009 informed members that the Council was preparing a **Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)** for the Glass Quarter. This document, which was developed during 2009, was adopted by Cabinet in December 2009. It provides a framework to guide development and investment in the Stourbridge Glass Quarter whilst recognising and retaining its unique heritage in order for it to evolve as visitor destination to the benefit of local residents, businesses and visitors.

Metal Festival 2011

18. The Black Country Authorities have agreed to develop a festival celebrating two forms of 'Metal' – the heavy metal industries of the Black Country and the influence this had on Heavy Metal rock music.
19. The Festival will be held from the August Bank Holiday for two weeks and will conclude at the Chainmakers Festival at the Black Country Living Museum. The Festival will include a series of exhibitions focusing on the musical heritage of the Black Country and the influence it had on Heavy Metal music, as well as the heavy metal industrial heritage of the Black Country. The Festival will also include events taking place in town halls and other music venues, visual arts performances and potentially events in town centres. A working group has been established through the Black Country Arts Partnership and funding is now being sought to develop these ideas further.

Rock and Fossil Festival 2009

20. The Rock and Fossil festival was held on the 19th & 20th September 2009 and attracted over 4000 visitors to this popular event at Dudley Museum and Art Gallery and Dudley Concert Hall. This year, our partners included Birmingham Universities Bio-Sciences department as well as the Natural History Museum who attended with their outreach team. This illustrates the high regard that the event has with the professional geological world as well as it being a fun and educational day for families and those interested in Geology.

21. The Festival was also successful in securing an Arts Council England Grant to develop a creative writing programme influenced by the geology of the area. Young people from around the Borough – including Wren’s Nest, Sedgley, Russells Hall and Sycamore Green were involved in a series of poetry writing sessions and their work is now being collated and published on a website. The programme proved to be particularly popular and it was encouraging to see some of the young people perform their poems at the Sedgely Festival and at the All Saints Christmas Festival. It is intended that this programme will be further developed for the 2011 Festival which will take place on the 24th and 25th September 2011.

Progress Update on current visitor economy activities

22. The Tourism Development team deliver an agreed set of activities as prescribed in the Culture and Tourism teams service plan. This is reviewed annually and includes the projects identified above in addition to;

Visitor Information

23. The Council, in partnership with the attractions have continued to hold ‘Market Stall’ days in the various town centres, promoting attractions and events to local residents. This has enabled us to be proactive about getting information out to our customers, rather than waiting for them to come and find it. It is planned that these events will continue in 2010.
24. A new website has been created to promote the Borough visitor attractions, events and accommodation. The Discover Dudley website is currently being ‘tested’ and will go live in time for the February half-term. The website will provide one avenue for residents and visitors to obtain information about what is taking place in the borough – including Festivals and Events. The website address is www.discoverdudley.org.uk. We will be looking at developing the website over the coming 12 months to include applications such as Facebook, Twitter and other social networking tools – a key aspect to the diversification of the marketing of a destination.

Dudley Attractions Group

25. The Dudley Attractions Group was established in early 2007 as a networking opportunity for the attractions in the borough and to establish a forum in which projects could be developed. The group, led by the tourism development assistant, has undertaken a number of initiatives over the past 12 months including;
- Discover Dudley weekend – focusing on encouraging Dudley Borough residents to explore their own area, the weekend on the 6th & 7th June hosted a number of activities and special promotional offers at attractions. The weekend will be repeated again in 2010.
 - Group Travel Packages – the attractions, along with the two main accommodation providers in the borough who are able to provide

accommodation for coach tours (the Copthorne and the Village Hotel and Leisure Club) have come together to offer group packages to group travel organisers.

Two packages have been developed – a 2 night package – ‘*Glass and the Past*’ and a 3 night package – ‘*Discover Dudley*’ tour. Both these packages have been promoted to the Coach Travel market over the past 4 months with a second wave being undertaken to over 2000 coach operators in January 2010.

We have also developed day packages with our attractions and this has been promoted to over 3000 Clubs and Societies in the Midlands and North of England in October. Two Familiarisation visits for group travel organisers have been held and a third is being held in March 2010, while a number of organisers have undertaken independent familiarisation visits.

- The group is planning on a set of new projects for 2010, including participating in the Heritage Open Days in September and other events included in the Cultural Olympiad.

IDEA Case Study

26. In late 2009, Dudley, as a non-traditional visitor destination was chosen by the IDeA (the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government) to be a case study on how to successfully develop the visitor economy. The Case Study identified that through establishing a clear strategic and corporate focus for the visitor economy and how through effective partnership working and engagement with the local community, tourism is now helping to change people’s perceptions of the area, and is becoming recognised as a key economic sector to help support and drive the areas regeneration.
27. The Case Study will be published on the IDeA’s website in the New Year.

Supporting Business

28. The team continues to support visitor economy related businesses. Two sessions have been held with businesses focusing on issues that are particularly important to them. Working with the Environmental Health team, a training session was held on environmental health issues. As a result of the training, all of the Bed and Breakfasts who were involved in the training have become registered with the Council and have subsequently been inspected through the Scores on the Doors programme. All have reached at least a 3 Star grading, with one reaching a 4 star grading.
29. The second session was on cost-effective marketing, which is particularly important in the current economic climate. As a result of the training, one B&B has re-developed their website, while the others have taken up opportunities to list their businesses on other tourism related websites. Further training sessions will continue in 2010.
30. The Tourism Development team will also be undertaking the yearly accommodation visits during 2010. This enables the team to meet the

accommodation providers in the borough and to undertake a basic assessment of the accommodation type and quality. This enables us to offer further support for the business and enable us to include the accommodation in any marketing material we produce.

Conclusion

31. Dudley has a strong foundation for developing its visitor economy. Over the past 12 months, significant funding programmes have supported the Boroughs aspiration in developing its visitor product and we will continue to ensure that residents and businesses within Dudley Borough benefit from these developments.

Finance

32. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Law

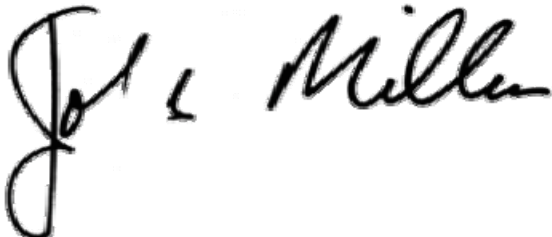
33. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 empowers the Council to take action to implement measures it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of the Borough.

Equality Impact

34. This work has been conducted in full accordance with the Council's equality and diversity policies and should in no way have any prejudicial impact on different racial groups, disabled people, both genders and /or relevant groups. The needs of children and young people are considered when undertaking any tourism activity.

Recommendation

35. It is recommended that the Select Committee:-
- notes the progress and achievements to date in respect of the development of the borough's visitor economy, the work of the tourism development team and the continued vision to develop Dudley as a world class visitor destination



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