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**SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ADULT EDUCATION -  
10<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2007**

**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 to date in respect of the development of the borough's visitor economy, future developments within the borough and to consider the extent of the future role that Dudley MBC should play in taking forward the growth of the borough's visitor economy.

**Background**

**Volume and Value of the Visitor Economy**

2. Expenditure within the UK visitor economy during 2005 was estimated to be over £68 billion.
3. In 2005, the Black Country welcomed approximately 15.8 million visitors – 14.6 million day visitors and 1.2 overnight visitors worth an estimated £855.3million
4. In 2004, there were approximately 4.8 million visitors to Dudley borough spending a total of £178 million. Of the 4.8 million visitors, approximately 4.4 million were day visitors and 400,000 overnight visitors. In Dudley Borough, it is estimated that 5,794 people are employed in tourism related industries (2005 are not yet available for Dudley Borough).
5. The visitor economy incorporates the whole of the visitor experience, including visitors and residents spending on entertainment, attractions, accommodation and the visitor component of retail and food and drink. The visitor economy also incorporates festivals and events, business tourism, sport, art and culture.
6. The look and feel of the destination is a vital ingredient in attracting visitors and therefore, areas such as transport, signposting and the cleanliness of our roadsides and open spaces play as much a part of the visitor economy as our attractions and accommodation providers.

**Visitor Attractions**

7. Dudley Borough has a wide variety of visitor attractions that focus on the 'real element' of the Borough and the Black Country. They include the Black Country Living Museum, Dudley Zoological Gardens (including the Castle), Dudley Canal

Tunnel and Limestone Mines, the Glass Quarter, Stourbridge encompassing the Red House Glass Cone, Broadfield House Glass Museum and the Ruskin Glass Centre, Himley Hall and Park as well as a number of local nature reserves including Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve and Saltwells Local Nature Reserve.

8. Increasingly, the boroughs entertainment venues are becoming an important element of the evening economy for the borough, especially with Dudley Concert Hall and Stourbridge Town Hall attracting well known performers and performances.
9. In addition, canals and the use of the canals – for leisure and events are increasingly being recognised as an important asset to the visitor economy across the Borough and the Black Country.
10. Future developments include the restoration project at Leasowes Park in Halesowen, the Castle Hill Development, including the Zoo and the Cradley Workers Institute at the Black Country Living Museum as part of a large 1930's Museum attraction. Developments which are currently in the pipeline include the Foster & Rastrick Foundry in Stourbridge and Black Country as an Urban Park, including Strata, the new visitor attraction that will link Castle Hill, Dudley with Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve.
11. Visitor figures for attractions in Dudley for 2006 (January – December) are as follows:

<b>Attraction</b>	<b>Visitor Numbers</b>
Dudley Zoological Gardens (and Castle)	165,000
Black Country Living Museum	245,345
Dudley Canal Tunnel & Singing Cavern	74,500
Dudley Museum and Art Gallery	19,284
Himley Hall, Dudley	12,906
Himley Park (events)	53,000 estimate
Broadfield House Glass Museum	9,098
Red House Glass Cone	27,963
Merry Hill Shopping Centre	21million visits by 1.9 million people
Royal Brierley Crystal	approx. 6,000 (no footfall count)

### **Dudley Attractions Survey**

12. The Tourism Development team commission a user survey of Dudley Attractions to provide an overview of the characteristics, opinions and behaviours of visitors to Dudley's main visitor attractions. Two surveys have now been undertaken during the summer months of 2003 and 2006.
13. Attractions surveyed in 2006 were Black Country Living Museum, Dudley Zoo and Castle, Dudley Museum & Art Gallery, Red House Glass Cone, Broadfield House Glass Museum and Dudley Canal Tunnel and Limestone Mines.

14. Key findings of the 2006 survey were;
  - 59% of all visitors to the attractions surveyed were from within the West Midlands conurbation area
  - From the breakdown of the West Midlands figures, 46% were from Dudley and 33% from the Birmingham area. 11% came from Wolverhampton and 10% from Walsall.
15. Compared to the 2003 survey, there has been a sizeable increase in the number of visitors coming from outside the West Midlands conurbation (23% in 2003 to 41% in 2006).
16. Respondents were asked whether they had visited the attraction they were interviewed at before - 62% answered 'yes'. For the particular attractions, 80% were repeat visitors at Dudley Zoo & Castle, 68% at Dudley Museum & Art Gallery and 63% at the Red House Glass Cone.
17. 65% of visitors stated that they had visited another attraction(s) whilst in Dudley Borough on the day they were interviewed. 21% stated that they had been on a general sightseeing trip and 19% said that they had eaten out in the area. 12% had been shopping and 12% had been on a canal trip. 10% of people did not partake in any other activity.
18. Respondents were asked to estimate how much their party were likely to spend. The average spend per person for their trip over all of attractions was £16 – this ranged from £22 at the Red House Glass Cone to £8 to at Dudley Museum and Art Gallery.

### **Dudley Accommodation**

19. The area in and around Dudley Borough has approximately 50 establishments (Hotels, Bed & Breakfasts and Self-Catering properties) providing accommodation in over 920 bedrooms. The borough does not have any caravan or camping sites.
20. Of these accommodation providers, only three (3) are part of a recognised quality assurance scheme (star grading). As such, to ensure that the accommodation promoted in the Borough is of a reasonable standard, the Tourism Development team undertake assessments of each of the properties promoted in the Dudley Accommodation Guide, on the Discover Dudley website or when events are taking place in the Borough. Last year, over 40 were assessed by the team with the majority of these being deemed appropriate for inclusion in promotional materials.
21. It is important to note that visitors do not recognise local authority boundaries when choosing where to stay, rather where the accommodation is situated in relation to their chosen destination. Therefore, visitors to Dudley Borough use a number of properties in south Staffordshire and north Worcestershire. This is particularly the case for caravan and camping sites where the Borough does not have any – many visitors stay at sites in south Staffordshire and north Worcestershire and travel into the Borough and the Black Country for their visits to attractions.

22. The Dudley Economic Impact Assessment indicates that there were approximately 400,000 overnight stays in the Borough during 2004 – this includes a combination of visitors staying in hotels and with friends or relatives (VFR). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of the overnight stays at hotels are business related during the week, however in recent times an increasing number of stays are for leisure purposes over the weekend. Festivals and events at attractions are an important factor in attracting visitors for these overnight weekend stays.

### **DMBC's relationship with private sector visitor attractions**

23. The Tourism Development team has a good working relationship with all of the attractions in the Borough, both those managed by the Council and those within the private sector.
24. An 'Attractions group' (focused on operational/marketing issues) has recently been established at the request of the attractions and provides an opportunity to meet, discuss new ideas and generally develop a better working relationship.
25. In addition, a meeting with all attractions (Chief Executive/Director level) within the Borough was held in August to address how Dudley Borough should develop its tourism product, therefore becoming more appealing to visitors. As a result of this meeting, it was agreed that a Dudley Borough Attractions group be formally constituted. A second meeting of this group is planned for late September 2007.
26. With regard to the relationship Dudley MBC has with the borough's attractions, the Council nominates Councillors to sit on the Boards of the following attractions – Black Country Living Museum (2 councillors), Dudley Zoological Gardens (3), Dudley Canal Trust (3) and Redhouse Glass Works Museum (3). In addition, one councillor is nominated to the West Midlands Canals Forum. These appointments are made on a yearly basis.
27. The Council also financially supports attractions external to the Council, including costs associated with the on-going maintenance of Dudley Zoological Gardens (DZG) with favourable loans and debt arrangements with Council finances as well as guarantor for trading losses. Dudley MBC also contributes financially to the Black Country Living Museum.

### **Strategic Context**

28. In March 2003, the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) transferred the strategic responsibility for tourism from Regional Tourist Boards to Regional Development Agencies which, for the West Midlands, is Advantage West Midlands (AWM).

### **West Midlands Regional Visitor Economy Strategy**

29. In 2004, the West Midlands Regional Visitor Economy Strategy was developed and presents a framework for the development of the visitor economy in the West Midlands. A key feature of the Strategy is the need to create successful, sustainable destinations. It identifies the need to focus on key destinations and visitor gateways. This Strategy identifies the Black Country as an emerging destination which requires regeneration investment.

30. A review of the delivery of the West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy was undertaken in late 2006 which proposed alterations to the organisations responsible for delivering the Strategy. The proposals also provide a stronger focus on delivery at a sub-regional level and the establishment of sub-regional Destination Management Partnerships (DMPS).
31. Following the review of the delivery structure, a 'refresh' of the West Midlands Strategy is currently being undertaken and is due to report back in late 2007. The 'refresh' will identify priorities for investment from Advantage West Midlands.

### **Tourism West Midlands**

32. As part of the regional structure for tourism, AWM manages regional policy in relation to tourism. In addition, it provides an 'executive' function to Tourism West Midlands, the West Midlands Strategic Tourism Body, who represent the 'voice' of industry and acts as the Champion for Tourism in the West Midlands. Tourism West Midlands consists of 17 individuals who have applied for a seat on the Board and includes attractions, hotels, retail outlets, agencies and local authority officers.
33. The Council's Tourism Development Officer sits on the board of Tourism West Midlands, as a Local Authority practitioner. In addition, she is Chair of the West Midlands Tourism Development Officers group – a working group of the West Midlands Local Government Association.
34. A diagram of the regional tourism structure is appended to this report – Appendix A.

### **Black Country Visitor Economy Strategy**

35. The Black Country Visitor Economy Strategy was produced in 2004 and identified the need for a Black Country Partnership to build on the existing Black Country Tourism initiative. It also identified the need to invest in the 5 key destinations of the Black Country : - Dudley Town Centre and Castle Hill, Brierley Hill/ Merry Hill, Walsall Waterfront, Wolverhampton City Centre and West Bromwich.
36. Local Authorities were tasked with the responsibility in managing the visitor destination, for example, public realm and waste collection, signposting and provision of facilities.

### **Dudley Action Plan**

37. Each of the four Black Country Local Authorities has an Action Plan sitting under the Black Country Visitor Economy Strategy. The Dudley Action Plan identifies the key activities to be implemented within Dudley and acts as the Service Plan for the Tourism Development team. The Action Plan is rolled forward yearly, taking into account the tourism activities at both a Black Country and a West Midlands level.

### **Destination Management Partnerships (DMPs)**

38. Black Country Tourism was established in 1999 following a successful ERDF application to establish a partnership of the four Black Country Local Authorities

to undertake marketing and promotional campaigns to encourage visitors to the Black Country. In 2001, a second ERDF bid was successful to continue the Black Country Tourism initiative, however, this time the project was to focus on business support activities. Dudley MBC was and continues to be the Accountable Body for both the ERDF programmes.

39. In 2005, the staff of Black Country Tourism were subject to TUPE arrangements with the Black Country Consortium and since April 2006, the project has been fully managed by Black Country Consortium.
40. Black Country Tourism was charged, in partnership with the Local Authorities and the private sector to co-ordinate the development of the Black Country Visitor Economy Strategy. Since the publication of the Strategy, the Black Country Consortium have managed Black Country Tourism
41. As stated earlier, the review of the delivery structure of the West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy provided an even stronger emphasis for delivery at a sub-regional level.
42. In 2006, Black Country Tourism applied to Tourism West Midlands for 'DMP status' which was subsequently approved. This provided Black Country Tourism with the opportunity to bid into the DMP Development Fund – a dedicated pot of money allocated to tourism projects by AWM.
43. The West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy envisages that Destination Management Partnerships will undertake the overall strategic management of the Visitor Economy, including marketing and promotion, product development and liaison with businesses.
44. Following changes to the funding framework from AWM for tourism and the ERDF funding currently available to Black Country Tourism (which comes to an end December 2008), a Forward Plan for tourism in the Black Country is being developed and is due to report in late 2007.

Some of the questions to be addressed are:

- What issues should we be addressing and are the priorities right?
  - Is the current structure fit for purpose? Who should be leading on tourism?
  - What are the local issues?
45. **Black Country Study** - The Visitor Economy is a key focus for the Black Country Study in developing the framework for the long-term renaissance of the sub-region.
  46. The Black Country Study proposes a revised status for Dudley Town Centre with a new role clearly focused on tourism, heritage, leisure and quality housing. The Examination in Public report published in early 2007 endorsed this role and strengthened the policy to be:

***“Policy PA11B: Dudley***

*Dudley will continue to perform an important role as a non-strategic town centre in the Black Country. Its future renaissance will be founded upon the town’s*

*unique tourism and cultural assets and major residential development as well as retail and other uses appropriate to a non-strategic centre<sup>1</sup>*

47. The **Dudley Borough Economic Strategy** sets out the long-term vision for economic regeneration in the Borough, articulated through five strategic aims. One of these aims is to improve the economic and environmental infrastructure of Dudley Borough and its town centres. One of the key objectives to deliver this aim is to develop the visitor economy through enhancing the Borough's tourism potential and promoting the Borough as a high quality visitor destination.
48. The **Dudley Borough Cultural Strategy** plays an important role in a regeneration context and embraces activities such as sport, the arts, tourism, libraries, museums and heritage – activities with economic as well as cultural and recreational dimensions. Key assets as identified in the Strategy include the Boroughs international heritage assets such as glass and geology, including Wren's Nest, Castle Hill and Dudley's canal network.

### **Future Developments & Opportunities for the Borough's Visitor Economy**

49. The landscape of the Borough's visitor economy is currently gaining greater momentum bringing with it significant potential investment and opportunities for the Borough. 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 increase the number of visitors to Castle Hill from half a million to 1 million.
50. Some of the key future developments include:
51. **Dudley Town Centre** – in addition to the draft revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the proposed role of Dudley Town Centre, the Dudley Area Development Framework (ADF) was adopted as supplementary planning guidance in December 2005. Identifying nine opportunity areas for development, work is now progressing and funding being sought to take forward proposals for specific sites.
52. **Castle Hill** - A revised outline planning application was submitted by St. Modwens Properties plc and approved by the Development Control Committee in June 2005 to develop a 65.7 hectare site at Castle Hill in Dudley (including the Freightliner site) into a major visitor attraction.
53. **Dudley Town Centre Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI)** – The THI is a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant-giving programme to assist in the repair and regeneration of the historic environment within conservation areas in towns and cities.

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<sup>1</sup> West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase One Revision - The Black Country. Panel Report Annexes.

54. The Council has been successful in securing a grant of £1.95m from the HLF subject to securing match funding of at least £2m.
55. Further information on the above developments are provided in a separate paper being presented to this Select Committee - Progress Report on Regeneration of Dudley Town Centre
56. **Strata - Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve and the Seven Sisters Mine -** Strata will be a new visitor attraction linking the Seven Sisters Mines and underground canal tunnels at Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve to Castle Hill, Dudley. The project is part of the Black Country's bid to the Big Lottery Fund's Living Landmarks: The People's Millions initiative – an opportunity for one transformational project within the UK to win up to £50 million.
57. In August 2006, the Black Country as an Urban Park project, was one of only 6 visionary projects successful in moving forward to the second stage of the Big Lottery Fund's Living Landmarks: The People's Millions programme, run in conjunction with ITV.
58. The short-listed projects will ultimately compete for the grant of up to £50 million, with the winning project being decided by a televised public vote in December 2007.
59. In addition to the Big Lottery Fund, the Council also submitted an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the 'above ground' elements of the Strata project, focusing on the Seven Sisters Mines and the Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve. The total project was £16.3million with a grant request of £11.6million from HLF. Unfortunately, the Trustees at their meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> July decided not to support the project as submitted, the main issue relating to the stabilisation of the Seven Sisters Mine and the 'value for money' which it represented.
60. The Trustees were supportive however of the proposals for the wider National Nature Reserve, including the proposals for enhanced interpretation around the site, increased opportunities for education and the educational facilities proposed. The Council have therefore been encouraged to resubmit an application focusing on these areas to the Heritage Lottery Fund which will be completed for the December deadline. A decision would be expected in June 2008.
61. A separate paper is being presented to the Select Committee Working Group on Strata and the funding programmes associated with the proposals on the 29<sup>th</sup> October 2007

### **Glass Quarter, Stourbridge**

62. The historic Glass Quarter in Stourbridge is a key asset to the tourism product in the Borough. Three main attractions are located in the Glass Quarter – Red House Glass Cone, Broadfield House Glass Museum and more recently the Ruskin Glass Centre. In addition, the small glass studios located within the Glass Quarter, particularly those at the Red House Glass Cone and the Ruskin Glass Centre provide an additional attraction for visitors wanting to buy or commission handmade glass.



63. The quality of the Glass Quarter and its attractions as a destination has been recognised both within visitor surveys and the winning of awards. In 2006, Broadfield House Glass Museum won the Heart of England in Excellence award for Best Small Visitor attraction, winning against other well known attractions such as Weston Park. The Red House Glass Cone won the Bronze award for Best Small Visitor Attraction at the Black Country Hotel and Tourism Awards while the International Festival of Glass won the Gold Award for Best Event or Festival.
64. The opportunities for the Glass Quarter are endless and as such, the Glass Quarter Development group has been established to ensure that the Borough capitalises the opportunities the Glass Quarter holds as a visitor destination. The group currently comprises Dudley MBC, the glass related attractions (Red House Glass Cone and Broadfield House Glass Museum) and Ruskin Glass Centre.
65. The group is currently developing a Glass Quarter Development Plan which will build on the successes of the International Festival of Glass and to provide a framework for: -
- developing a co-ordinated approach to the promotion & marketing, including a new brand for the Glass Quarter and website;
  - support for businesses – focusing on the opportunities available at the Ruskin Glass Centre and the Red House Glass Cone and future opportunities through the proposed development at Ruskin Glass Centre;
  - the physical development of the Glass Quarter area including pedestrian signage, heritage trails and 'blue plaque' schemes;
  - education and opportunities for encouraging schools and other educational groups to visit the Glass Quarter.
66. A new brand has been developed for the Glass Quarter and 2007/8 will see increased joint marketing of the area aimed at encouraging more visitors into the Quarter.
67. The International Festival of Glass has been extremely successful in encouraging visitors to the area – 9,000 visitors attended in 2006 and has been recognised as a case for best practice. The next International Festival of Glass will take place in 2008.

### **Dudley's Canals**

68. Canals are increasingly being recognised as an important asset of the tourism offer within the Black Country and in particular Dudley. Dudley Canal Tunnel and Limestone Mines attracts in the region of 75,000 visitors per annum while events at the Bonded Warehouse (Stourbridge Navigation Trust), the Festival of Water and Light at the Waterfront and other boating festivals around the Borough attraction many more visitors.
69. The 30-year vision for the Black Country, the Black Country Study, and the subsequent Inspector's Report following the Examination in Public and the Black Country Urban Park have all placed a strong emphasis on how the canals can contribute to the renaissance of the sub-region.

70. The 30-year vision states that the Black Country's canals have become a World Heritage Site. This initiative is being led by Dudley MBC, with the leader of the Council being the Canals Champion for the Black Country. A Management Plan for the canal network is required as part of the World Heritage process and this has been supported within the Inspector's report from the Black Country Study Examination in Public.
71. The management plan is essential if we are to ensure that the heritage which could warrant the network becoming a World Heritage Site is conserved and new developments across the network are managed appropriately. Significant resource will need to be invested in this area to ensure that we ensure that the policies identified within the Regional Spatial Strategy are implemented.
72. The Canals have also been identified as one of the three elements within the Black Country Urban Park concept – Corridors (the other two being Beacons and Communities). The Black Country Landscape Action Plan will encourage further work on how canals can form part of the Black Country's renaissance.
73. The Canal Strategy for Dudley Borough was produced in 1999. Opportunities are available to make more of this unique asset, however limited resources has meant that only limited opportunities have been developed. Work is ongoing to identify resources to take advantage of what the canal network has to offer.

## **London 2012**

74. The London 2012 Games provide the Borough with not only the opportunity for encouraging young people to participate in sport and a healthy lifestyle, it will also provide the platform for the UK and therefore the West Midlands region to promote itself to both overseas visitors or domestic visitors wanting to get away from London during the Games. The opportunity of Villa Park being used as an Olympic venue and the USA Track & Field team being based in Birmingham should be recognised and harnessed.

## **Progress Update on current visitor economy activities**

75. The Council's Tourism Development Team is part of the Economic Regeneration Division within the Directorate of the Urban Environment. The team is currently resourced with 2 full time staff and operates with a small operational budget.
76. The team works with other Divisions/Directorates and other local authorities to develop and deliver the wider visitor offer and infrastructure including Countryside Services, Museums, Town Centre Management, Transportation (signage) and Engineering.
77. Key development work that has been taken forward by the Tourism Development Team, as part of the Dudley Action Plan of the Black Country Visitor Economy Strategy, to further develop the Borough's visitor economy includes:
  - Strata – project management of the Strata project including preparation of funding bids to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Big Lottery Fund as part of the Black Country as an Urban Park – the Black Country's submission to the Living Landmarks: the People's Millions Programme.

- Supporting the development of a new Black Country Destination Management System (DMS), including a new tourism website (yet to be launched) for Dudley Borough and the attractions managed by the Council, enabling information to be transferred across a series of tourism websites including Dudley, Black Country Tourism, Enjoy England and VisitBritain.
- Implementing the sub-regional tourism signposting strategy to ensure that all white on brown tourism signs in Dudley meet new signposting regulations and that all visitor attractions in the borough are signed appropriately. All attractions that are now eligible for white on brown tourism signs have now been signed.

They include:-

- |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| ○ Dudley Zoo and Castle                                  | ○ The Leasowes                        |
| ○ Black Country Living Museum                            | ○ Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve |
| ○ Dudley Canal Tunnel and Limestone Mines                | ○ Saltwells Local Nature Reserve      |
| ○ Glass Quarter  | ○ Cotwell End Nature Reserve          |
| ○ Ruskin Glass Centre                                    | ○ Himley Hall & Park                  |
| ○ Red House Glass Cone                                   | ○ Dudley Concert Hall                 |
| ○ Broadfield House Glass Museum (signed as Glass Museum) | ○ Bonded Warehouse                    |
|  | ○ Copthorne Hotel                     |
|  | ○ The Dell Stadium                    |

78. In addition, the following destinations are signed according to the regulations before 2004:-

- Merry Hill
  - Brierley Hill Glass
  - Crystal Leisure Centre
  - St Michael's Church (Brierley Hill)
  - Dormston Leisure Centre
- Working with the Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support<sup>2</sup>, the team has helped to increase the level of support for tourism businesses including workshops/events and networking meetings for accommodation providers. The first meeting was held in early 2007 focusing on crime prevention – a serious issue for those who operate Bed & Breakfasts within their own home. Further events are planned for the 'low season' later in 2007.
  - Research has been undertaken on the taxi system in Dudley in order to look at establishing a 'taxi culture' in the Borough – this includes proposals for a 'Black

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<sup>2</sup> The Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support is a 3-year Advantage West Midlands funded project providing specialist business support to small to medium (sme) tourism businesses within the West Midlands. Each sub-region has a dedicated Business Advisor located within the local Business Link (now the Brokerage Service) who can provide one to one business advice specifically focusing on the issues a tourism business faces.

Country Visitor Economy Knowledge' test and is currently being piloted in Wolverhampton.

79. Ongoing activities undertaken by the Tourism Development team include:

*Ensuring Quality*

- Undertaking inspections of all accommodation providers who are to be included in the 'Dudley Accommodation' brochure
- Quality is an important element in the visitor economy and encouraging accommodation providers to participate in one of the national quality assurance schemes (Star ratings approved by Visit Britain or the AA) is a difficult task. Therefore, as one measure to ensure that we are promoting accommodation of a minimum standard, we undertaken yearly informal accommodation inspections.
- Dudley operates an 'Inspected First' scheme which ensures that those businesses that have been assessed are promoted first in any publication or website listing. Many local authorities have developed an 'Inspected Only' approach to promoting accommodation (only promoting properties which are graded), however as only three (3) of our hotels or Bed & Breakfasts in the Borough are currently assessed it would be difficult to adopt this approach at this current time.
- With regard to our visitor attractions, Dudley is one of only a few local authority areas in England to have all its visitor attractions assessed as part of the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS). The VAQAS scheme provides visitors with the assurance that they are visiting an attraction which has passed an assessment on its quality, including value for money and customer service.
- In the wider recognition of quality attractions and products, a number of the Borough's attractions, accommodation providers and events have won tourism awards over the past 18 months.
- At the 2006 Heart of England in Excellence Tourism Awards, Broadfield House Glass Museum won the Gold Award for Best Small Visitor Attraction for the region. Graham Worton, the Keeper of Geology at Dudley Museum & Art Gallery won the Gold Award for Outstanding Customer Service at both the Heart of England and the Enjoy England Excellence in Tourism Awards– the best in England.
- Dudley Rock & Fossil Festival won the Bronze Award at 2007 Black Country Hotel and Tourism Awards, in the Best Festival or Event Category.
- Dudley's attractions and the people who work at them are now being recognised for their quality – the best marketing tool that could be used to attract visitors coming to the borough and more importantly returning.

80. Importantly, the awards presented to the above individuals, attractions and events have firmly placed Dudley on the 'tourism map'. Where previously 'traditional' visitor destinations have been asked to lead on certain issues, Dudley Borough is now being asked to share its best practice with others. For example,

Graham Worton has been the 'face' of the 2007 Heart of England in Excellence Awards and is now a judge on the panel for Outstanding Customer Service.

81. The International Festival of Glass is regularly now being asked to present how it has managed and developed the Festival to different organisations (including the Potteries) and at many different conferences. Dudley is also at the forefront of the 'geotourism' movement with the whole of England looking to Dudley at how we promote our geological heritage.
82. With regard to other areas that the team are involved in, we ensure that many of the Strategies and plans developed within the Council and externally reference tourism where appropriate, including the Council Plan, Economic Strategy, Unitary Development Plan etc and externally in terms of the development of sub-regional and regional strategies.
83. The team is responsible, in partnership with the Museums Service, for organising the Dudley Rock & Fossil Festival and supports other events such as the International Festival of Glass.
84. Print media is also an important element for promoting the borough and the team produces the Dudley Accommodation Guide and the Dudley Attractions Guide in addition to the Real Ale Guide in partnership with the two CAMRA branches in the borough.

### **Tourism Budgets**

85. Since the appointment of a Tourism Development Officer in 2000, the funds available for tourism development activity has risen from £0 in 2000/1 to £42,200 in 2006/7. The growth in the Tourism Development budget has enabled the team to implement a number of elements of the Visitor Economy Strategy including supporting visitor attractions in areas such as quality (Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme and Customer Care), targeted marketing activity, general capacity building in addition to leveraging in additional funding from outside the Council. This is in addition to the activities as described above.
86. Work remains to be done on a number of elements of the Visitor Economy Strategy:-
  - Canals development
  - Additional signage
  - Product development such as trails, new events, additional signage and interpretation
  - Better co-ordination across the Council
  - Cultural Services development – new opportunities for museums
  - Opportunities for other funding
  - Visitor Information – new technologies
  - Accommodation grading
87. Resources have been redirected over the past 18 months when the Tourism Development Officer has been project managing the Big Lottery and Heritage Lottery Fund applications for the Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve.

## **Provision of Visitor Information**

88. Visitors need to be informed at every stage of their journey – pre-visit, travel and arrival, during and after their visit. The various ways in which we provide this information needs to be easy to access and up to date and in a format that is applicable to the specific individual or group.
89. The various ways in which the Council provides information about the Borough is mainly focused on print media, websites and person to person information over the telephone.
90. The Tourism Development team produce four brochures – Dudley Attractions Guide, Dudley Accommodation Guide, the Glass Directory (a Glass Quarter Development group initiative to promote all glass makers and attractions within the Glass Quarter or who have a connection to it) and the Dudley Real Ale Guide in partnership with the Dudley Branch of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA).
91. Other leaflets are produced by the Council's Museums - Red House Glass Cone, Broadfield House Glass Museum, Dudley Museum & Art Gallery the Juniors at Museums (JAM) Club, Halls Entertainment team, Countryside Services and Himley Hall & Park. Many of these have recently been redesigned to take into account the changing requirements of visitors.
92. In addition, the team maintains the Discover Dudley website – the tourism pages of the Councils website. This provides information on the boroughs attractions, events and accommodation providers. It also has a facility to request information and brochures. The tourism pages of the Councils website are currently being redesigned, along with the website pages for the main council operated attractions – Broadfield House Glass Museum, Red House Glass Cone, Himley Hall and Park and Dudley Museum & Art Gallery. The redesign will ensure that there is a consistency of information across all the attractions and that the information provided on the new websites can be transferred to other Content Management Systems. It is anticipated that the new websites will be live in the Autumn.
93. A Visitor Information Strategy is currently being prepared for the West Midlands region. This will provide the Black Country with a basis for developing a Black Country wide approach to visitor information for all levels of the customer journey.
94. Key areas in which the strategy should address are:-
  - Print – destination and area guides, places to visit, maps
  - Electronic media – including websites and other e-marketing tools
  - Contact services, including Destination Tourist Information Centres (TICs), Local information centres, telephone services/contact centres, front line staff
  - Signage – Highways and pedestrian signage
  - Data Management – Destination Management Systems

### *Visitor Information Centre*

95. In 2003, the services provided by Dudley Visitor Information were transferred to Dudley Council Plus. Dudley Council Plus now deals with enquiries in person,

over the telephone and sometimes via email. The Tourism Development team answer queries that have been sent via the tourism pages of the Council's website and enquiries by post.

96. The Tourism Development team continually update the Discover Dudley website (the Council's tourism pages) for use by the general public and for the Customer Service Advisors at Dudley Council Plus. Over 700 events are entered into the database every year as well as information on attractions, accommodation providers and special events.
97. Discussions are taking place about how Dudley Council Plus can further improve the service that they provide to residents and visitors.
98. A new 'Official Partner' programme has been developed by VisitBritain in partnership with the regional tourism delivery partners (AWM for our region) which offers guidelines for any organisation operating a Tourist Information service.
99. Full details of the requirements are available on request, however these include:-
  - A service which is in a key visitor location with a proven demand for high quality tourist information
  - Use of a Destination Management System (DMS) and the EnglandNet platform (the DMS for promoting England)
  - Record visitor enquiries by email, telephone and in person
  - Free of charge and offer opening hours which meet local needs
  - Located in an area which meets proven customer demand, either stand alone or within an attraction or other related facility
  - Provide after-hours information
  - Employ paid, professional staff who are dedicated to providing tourist information only
  - Staff should have a strong knowledge of the England product
  - Accommodation promoted or booked by the service must be assessed by VisitBritain or the AA
  - Information should be available on neighbouring destinations

### **Future direction and areas for consideration in developing Dudley's Visitor Economy**

100. The visitor economy is becoming an increasingly important sector of the Borough's economy. In addition, the assets of the borough provide residents with the opportunity for them being ambassadors for where they live.
101. There is now a clear vision for Dudley town centre in terms of developing its new role as a high quality visitor destination and as the focal point for tourism in Black Country.
102. In the short to medium term, the focus for developing Dudley as a high quality visitor destination will be based around developing the attractions in and around the Castle Hill redevelopment, including Strata and the 'real assets' that the Borough already has – Glass, Canals, Geology and Industrial Heritage.

103. This future development will contribute to converting day visitors to overnight visitors in order to maximise spend and grow this area of the local economy. However, a number of areas need to be addressed if we are to fulfil our role as the visitor destination of choice.
104. The Black Country Visitor Economy Strategy provides a framework for what the Black Country should be addressing if it wants to become a strong visitor destination. However, we need to ensure that Dudley borough has debated and agreed upon its priorities for future development. With the refresh of both the West Midlands and the Black Country Visitor Economy Strategies, and the impending 'sign off' of the Black Country Study, it is now an opportune time to reflect on how Dudley is to become a high quality visitor destination.
105. The potential areas for consideration include:
- The wider implications of implementing the physical regeneration developments in Dudley, as detailed in paragraphs 49-74, in order to improve the visitor experience and encourage the day visitors to the attractions to spend more time in the borough. This therefore has implications for a number of areas including the maintenance of public and private realm, improvements to eyesore sites, development of the town centres including the evening economy to encourage visitors to spend more time in the borough and increase the number of overnight visitors
  - Destination Management Partnerships – who should be taking the lead in the developing the visitor economy in the Black Country – what should Dudley's role be?
  - What is the role of the Boroughs 'Cultural facilities'? Should the borough's Museums, heritage sites and nature reserves be an integral part of the making the Borough a high quality visitor destination or an asset focusing on the needs of the local community?
  - How should we be addressing the provision of Visitor Information – both in person and virtually?
  - What importance do Canals have for the visitor to Dudley Borough?
  - What other areas provide opportunities for development potential? Churches, other heritage sites, listed buildings. Are these priorities for Dudley Borough?
  - How should we be engaging the private sector in developing the tourism potential of the borough?
  - Visitor destinations of note have champions and ambassadors – how should we address this in Dudley?
  - How do we better co-ordinate activities across the council which have an impact on a successful visitor destination? E.g open space, culture, planning, traffic and transport ?



## **Conclusion**

106. Dudley Borough is an area with a rich heritage. The attraction we have as a destination is that everything residents and visitors see is real – geology, glass, canals, countryside, industrial heritage. We need to ensure that these assets are protected both in the present and for future generations and that Dudley achieves becoming a high quality visitor destination.

## **Finance**

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

## **Law**

108. 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.

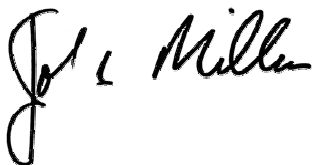
## **Equality Impact**

109. 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**

110. 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 and the work of the tourism development team
- requests the Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration to note the future developments and the areas for future consideration in developing the direction for the visitor economy in order to maximise the benefits for the borough
- requests the Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration to consider the role that Dudley MBC should have in taking forward the development of the visitor economy both in the borough and the Black Country.



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**JOHN B MILLAR**  
Director of the Urban Environment

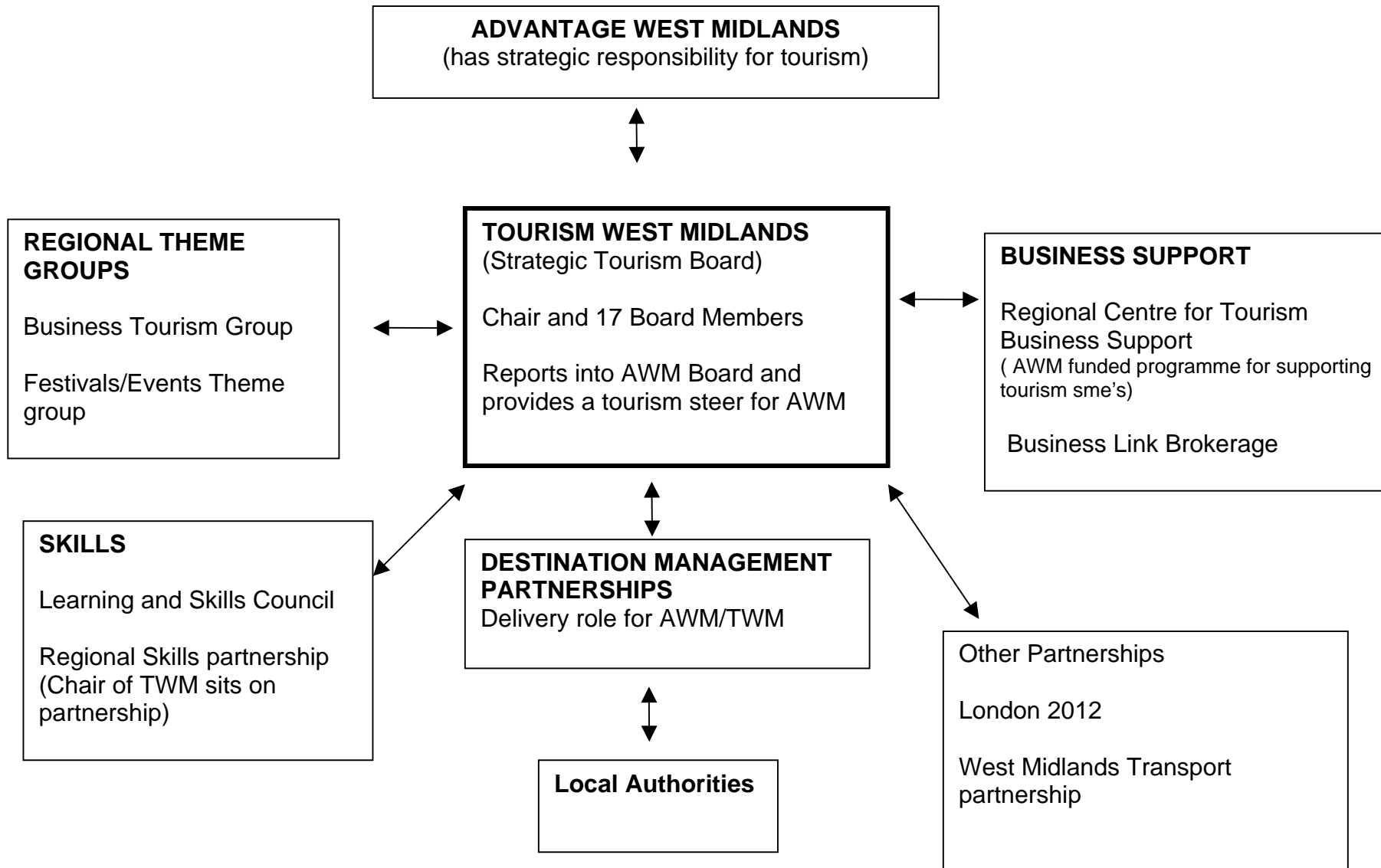
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### **List of Background Papers**

Black Country Visitor Economy Strategy  
West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy

# WEST MIDLANDS TOURISM STRUCTURE



## **Background Information**

### ***Black Country Tourism***

Black Country Tourism was established in 1999 following a successful ERDF application to establish a partnership of the four Black Country Local Authorities to undertake marketing and promotional campaigns to encourage visitors to the Black Country. In 2001, a second ERDF bid was successful to continue to Black Country Tourism initiative, however this time the project was to focus on business support activities. Dudley MBC was and continues to be the Accountable Body for both the ERDF programmes.

In 2005, the staff of Black Country Tourism were subject to TUPE arrangements with the Black Country Consortium and since April 2006, the project has been managed by Black Country Consortium.

With the reorganisation of the tourism structures in the region, and the desire from AWM to have a focus on sub-regional delivery, Black Country Tourism was recognised in 2006 as the Destination Management Partnership for the Black Country.