
**SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ADULT EDUCATION -
14th JANUARY 2009**

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 18 months in respect of the development of the borough's visitor economy and future planned developments within the borough.

Strategic Context - West Midlands Regional Visitor Economy Strategy

2. 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).
3. The West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy (VES) was reviewed in 2007, with significant revisions made with regard to its delivery structure and subsequent implementation.
4. As part of the review, the former Regional Tourist Board, Heart of England Tourism was no longer contracted to deliver activity on behalf of AWM, and has subsequently ceased trading. As part of the review, AWM has enhanced its in-house tourism team and will now rely on working with key sub-regional partners and regional partners to deliver the Strategy according to the new delivery plan.
5. The Tourism West Midlands Board provides the overview of the VES and its subsequent delivery. The Councils Tourism Development Officer is a TWM Board Member.
6. The review of the West Midlands VES provided the opportunity to provide a focus for funding and development, which had been lacking in the initial Strategy. The Strategy has now identified four 'market growth' areas which are considered to have the potential to significantly impact on GVA for the region – one of key performance indicators for the Visitor Economy Strategy.
 - The four areas are:
 - Festivals and Events
 - Food and Drink
 - Major Conferences & Events
 - Culture

7. The 'Underpinning Programmes' involves a significant range of activities which provide a foundation for the visitor economy, with responsibility for delivery resting between regional, sub-regional and local partners.
8. The key areas are;
 - Quality and Customer Service
 - Skills and Business Development
 - ICT
 - Sustainable tourism
 - Research/ Intelligence
 - Core domestic marketing
9. A Delivery Plans for the VES has been developed and individual action plans for each of the themes are currently being developed with key partners.

Destination Management Partnerships (DMPs)

10. The West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy (2004) outlined Destination Management Partnerships (DMPs) as the 'preferred' delivery mechanism at a sub-regional level. Over the past 3 years, each of the seven sub-regions within the West Midlands has been either restructuring and existing or forming a new Destination Management Partnership.
11. A Destination Management Partnership can be defined as a partnership formed to direct, develop, promote and provide a quality destination. It can take various forms and should aim to:
 - Create a destination of quality, which works for both visitor and resident, approaching its management holistically with appropriate and integrated infrastructure, public realm, seamless access and memorable experiences
 - Reflect a partnership of both the public and private sectors
 - Reduce duplication of expenditure and clarify marketing messages
 - Instil a culture of excellence across all organisations, attractions and providers of the importance of quality and pride of place
 - Communicate and connect with other sub-regional/local authority functions especially transport, planning and environmental
 - Work closely with regeneration & town/city centre management
 - Work in partnership across regional and county boundaries
 - Be a membership organisation
12. AWM has identified funding for a 3-year period (2008/9 – 2010/2011) to support recognised Destination Management Partnerships (DMPs) to deliver both sub-regional visitor economy plans and elements of the 'Underpinning Programme'. The funding is subject to a Destination Management Partnership being place, with an agreed 3-year business/ delivery plan. AWM have indicated that the funding should;
 - add value to and not substitute existing funding/activities
 - support activities which feature in DMPs' delivery plans and support identified priorities

- Provide additionality - project proposals should not result in substitution of existing funds
 - Support activity which demonstrates how AWM investment levers additional funds and investment
 - Provide specified outputs - value for money in delivering AWM outputs should be considered in developing projects
13. AWM funding will not support;
- DMPs with creating delivery structures
 - Financially support DMP staff
 - Destination Management Systems (web based content management systems to support destination websites)
14. The Black Country Chief Executives, through the Black Country Consortium Ltd have agreed to the support the formation of a Destination Management Partnership for the Black Country and have also supported the reallocation of the £16,000 each local authority currently contributes to support the 'Advancing Tourism in the Black Country' ERDF programme to the Black Country Destination Management Partnership from 1st April 2009.
15. A Steering Group has been established, consisting of both public and private sector partners to assess the way in which tourism moves forward in the Black Country and the potential structure of a Destination Management Partnership. A DMP Board will be established by 1st April 2009.

Regional Spatial Strategy

16. In January 2008, the Black Country Study was approved as Phase 1 revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy.
17. Dudley town centre, with its cluster of visitor attractions has been allocated a new role; its new policy states

“Policy PA11A (E): Brierley Hill and 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 centre¹”

18. 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.

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

Dudley's Visitor Economy

19. The visitor economy is worth in the region of £178 million to the boroughs economy and directly supports around 5,500 jobs. We welcome around 4.8 million visitors every year, who come for either leisure or business, with around 400,000 staying overnight.
20. The Black Country's visitor base is mainly drawn from day visitors from within a 2 hour drive. Our attractions – which are considered to be good value for money or indeed free, provide a good foundation to attract those visitors who are looking for good quality days out. Evidence from our Attractions survey indicate that overall, all of our attractions rate highly in the quality of their visitor experience.
21. A good quality experience leads to happy customers which ultimately lead to increased visitors. This is evidenced by our visitor figures to attractions. Nationally, visits to visitor attractions have been increasing year on year and Dudley is no exception. Numbers of visitors to the Boroughs attractions have grown on average by 2.5% per annum and this is hoped to continue into next year, although we do need to be mindful of the current economic climate and its potential impact on visitor figures.

Future Developments & Opportunities for the Borough's Visitor Economy

22. 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 repeat visitors)
 - increase the number of visitors to Castle Hill from half a million to 1 million per annum.

Supporting Projects

Dudley Town Centre & Townscape Heritage Initiative

23. The implementation of both the Dudley Area Development Framework (ADF) and the Townscape Heritage Initiative will have a significant impact on the desirability of Dudley town centre as a support destination to the Castle Hill attractions. The Tourism development team is involved in both these initiatives.

Strata - Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve and The Seven Sisters Mine

24. Unfortunately the Black Country Urban Park bid narrowly lost out to the Sustrans Connect 2 bid for cycleways in the People's Millions vote in December 2007.
25. Nevertheless, the Council continues to support the vision for the Strata project. An application was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund in March 2008 and resulted in a £800,000 award from HLF.

26. The project – Wren’s Nest National Nature Reserve: Ripples through Time, focuses on two main areas – the physical enhancements of the NNR and developing programmes for education, interpretation and community engagement.
27. Physical enhancements to the NNR include improvements to entrances, paths, steps and fencing and creating a new accessible route around the NNR. In addition, the project will renew external access to the principal Scheduled Monument feature of the NNR, the Seven Sisters Mine which has been fenced off and inaccessible to the public for the past 7 years
28. Interpretation & Learning will be provided via the provision of integrated, site-wide interpretation of the NNR and its features including the Seven Sisters Mine. Development of learning resources including on-site and outreach programmes, website, downloadable learning packages (including podcast) and expanded guided walks, talks and special events.
29. The total project cost is £1,152,000, with the remainder of the funding being found from within the Councils own budgets and organisations such as Landfill Tax, English Heritage and Natural England.
30. Further design work is currently being undertaken and a Stage 2 application is to be submitted by September 2009, to allow the Heritage Lottery Fund to assess the final design and award the full grant.
31. In addition, the Council agreed in September 2008 to fund the stabilisation works at the Step Shaft mine. This work, which is currently in progress, provides temporary support to the mine gallery which, was deteriorating at a faster pace than previously thought, and keeps alive the possibility of achieving the full Strata vision for the site.

A Black Country Geopark

32. A Geopark is a formally designated area, acknowledged by UNESCO, with a geological heritage of significance, with a coherent and strong management structure and where a sustainable economic development strategy is in place.
33. The global network of national Geoparks, assisted by UNESCO, provides a platform of active cooperation between experts and practitioners in geological heritage. Under the umbrella of UNESCO, and through exchange between the global network partners, important national geological sites gain worldwide recognition and profit through the exchange of knowledge, expertise, experience and staff with other Geoparks.
34. The Black Country has registered its intent to submit an application to the European Geopark Network to become a Geopark. A Geopark designation will provide a significant platform to further support the development of Geotourism in the Black Country and the Borough. Wren’s Nest NNR has been proposed as the ‘headquarters’ of the Geopark.

Stourbridge Glass Quarter

35. The historic Glass Quarter in Stourbridge is a key visitor destination in the borough featuring attractions and glass studios that enable the history of the area to be commemorated
36. The quality of the Glass Quarter and its attractions as a destination has been recognised both within visitor surveys and the winning of awards most recently, the Red House Glass Cone which won the Best Exhibition on a small budget at the Museums, Libraries and Archives West Midlands Renaissance awards 2008.
37. Similarly, the International Festival of Glass also won the Silver award at the Heart of England in Excellence awards in October 2008 for Best Tourism Experience.
38. The Glass Quarter Development group was established in 2006 to ensure that the Borough capitalises on 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.
39. The 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.
 - A new marketing brand has been developed for the Stourbridge Glass Quarter and 2009/10 will see increased joint marketing of the area aimed at encouraging more visitors into the Glass Quarter.

Glass Quarter Supplementary Planning Document

40. A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is currently being developed for the Glass Quarter.
41. The draft aim of this document is to provide 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.

42. Objectives

- To define a boundary for the Glass Quarter (backed up by reasoned evidence of the Historic Landscape Characterisation Study).
- To build a 'sense of place' for the Glass Quarter through Design Guidance so that it can be developed and enhanced as a visitor destination.
- Provide a framework to guide the development of identified opportunity sites.
- To identify suitable locations for live/ work units to act as a catalyst for regeneration/ investment in the area.
- Provide a policy framework for the delivery of public realm improvements/ public art works.

43. Initial 'front-loading' consultation will be undertaken during January 2009, with full public consultation being held in the Summer. The document will be completed by December 2009.

Ruskin Glass Centre and Glasshouse College redevelopment

44. At the opening of the 2008 British Glass Biennale on the 21st August 2008, it was announced by Advantage West Midlands, the regional development agency, that they will be making available £9 million of funding to Ruskin Mill Educational Trust for the redevelopment of the Ruskin Glass Centre site. This is in addition to the £2 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund which was announced in July 2008.

45. The funding will help restore the Victorian glasshouse, which currently is housing the British Glass Biennale and transform it into a state-of-the-art glass, arts and education centre. In addition, 24 new and refurbished specialist business units are being built which can be rented by the hour by glassworkers and artists. alongside the creation of workshops for small businesses, heritage trails and facilities for visitors, a volunteer training programme and the development of heritage education.

46. Work will begin in the summer of 2009 and is expected to be completed by autumn 2011.

International Festival of Glass 2008

47. 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.

48. Festival attendees are able to discover the dramatic, imaginative and inspiring uses of glass through a series of master classes or the 'public celebration' over the Bank Holiday weekend in August. This year, 15 exhibitions, 20 lectures, four glass fairs, expert demonstrations, heritage walks, 'have a go' sessions and the British Glass Biennale, combined to create a wonderful atmosphere to celebrate British Glass in Stourbridge.

49. The British Glass Biennale, a major component of the IFG but also an independent exhibition in its own right, was also established in 2004 to showcase and celebrate the best of British Glass. In only four years, it is now the largest selling exhibition of contemporary glass in the UK, featuring over 80 artists, attracting top collectors and enthusiasts from around the world.
50. 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 2008 International Festival of Glass which took place between 22nd August – 28th August attracted in the region of 10,000 visitors – from all over the UK and the world.
51. The economic impact of the IFG is significant, not only for the glass related businesses, but also other businesses in the borough, including accommodation providers, restaurants and pubs. Over the weekend, all the Bed and Breakfasts in the surrounding area were 100% occupied – all with IFG attendees. From the research carried out at the Festival, it can be estimated that the local economy was boosted by over £500,000 in expenditure from Festival attendees.

Place-Making (Destination) Charter

52. The Destination Charter was developed during 2007 by the Partners for England initiative (the Forum which has the specific remit of ensuring engagement is secured between all partners on the key issues facing the English tourism industry) and adopted by the Local Government Association earlier in 2008.
53. The charter outlines key roles and responsibilities for all partners involved in the delivery of tourism including Local Authorities, DMPs, Regional Development Agencies, VisitBritain and the Tourism Alliance
54. Dudley MBC will be working towards adopting the Place-Making charter in early 2009.

Progress Update on current visitor economy activities

55. The Council's Tourism Development Team was relocated in April 2008 from Economic Regeneration into Culture and Leisure under the new service, Culture and Tourism.
56. The team continues to work 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.

Provision of Visitor Information

57. 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.

58. The various ways in which the Council and its partners provides information about the Borough is mainly focused on print media, websites and person to person information over the telephone.
59. The Tourism Development team produce four brochures – Dudley Attractions Guide, Dudley Accommodation Guide, Glass Maker and Designers (a Glass Quarter Development group initiative to promote all glass makers and attractions within the Glass Quarter) and the Dudley Real Ale Guide in partnership with the Dudley Branch of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA), the latter being produced biennially.
60. 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.
61. The tourism pages of the Councils website are currently being redesigned, along with the website pages for the main council operated attractions. 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.
62. After the success in 2007 of holding three visitor information ‘stalls’ at Dudley Market, the tourism development team, in partnership with the main visitor attractions have rolled the programme out to attend 11 market days in the four main town centre markets over the Summer period in 2008. This is in addition to special events within the Borough.
63. This proactive measure of providing visitor information to residents has proved to be extremely popular and will continue in 2009 to provide an opportunity to promote Dudley Borough to local residents.

Supporting Business

64. The team continues to support visitor economy related businesses. Recent work has included supporting accommodation providers to become compliant with the new Fire Regulations Order and new initiatives will be based on health and safety and property security. Of course work with attractions around marketing their attractions continues.

Conclusion

65. 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

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

Law

67. 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

68. 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

69. 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
 - recommends to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture the aspiration for a Black Country Geopark
 - recommends to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture Dudley MBC adopts the Place-Making Charter



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JOHN B MILLAR
Director of the Urban Environment

Contact Officer: Penny Russell
Telephone: 01384 814039
Email: penny.russell@dudley.gov.uk

List of Background Papers

West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy (2007)
Place Making : A Charter for destination Management