

**NORTH EAST DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

**TOURISM REVIEW**

**APRIL 2014**

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## **Chairs Foreword**

I am pleased to present this report on behalf of the Economic Regeneration, Skills and Environment Scrutiny Committee. It details the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Committee from its review of the Tourism Service.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all stakeholders involved in the review for their advice, support and cooperation throughout the review process and in particular, the staff of the service who took the time to speak to members of the Committee. In addition I would also like to thank the Peak Borders Forum for inviting us to attend their Annual Meeting and gather views from their members.

In conclusion I would like to thank members of the Committee and Sue Broadhead our Scrutiny Manager for the work they undertook in gathering evidence and co-ordinating the review.

Councillor John Windle

## **Review Panel**

The review panel comprised the following members:

Councillor J Windle	(Labour) Review Chair
Councillor A Cooper	(Independent)
Councillor N Dolby	(Labour)
Councillor W Lilleyman	(Labour)
Councillor J D McGrory	(Conservative)
Councillor B Rice	(Labour)
Councillor P J Riggott	(Labour)

## **1. Recommendations**

- 1.1 That the Council ensure that we maximise the significant benefits that Tourism can bring to the area.
- 1.2 That the service continues to work corporately and connections are not lost following restructures.
- 1.3 That a data base is created following the undertaking of an audit of local activities, arts groups and events to determine what contribution they make to the tourism offer and how best these events can be co-ordinated and promoted to support tourism.
- 1.4 That Parish Council's be contacted to gather information about local trails, cafés, farm shops and any other relevant facilities that could be advertised as part of the areas offer.
- 1.5 That a review of the information on the Council's website be undertaken to ensure the links to tourism events/attractions specifically in the District be improved so it provides a more dedicated information source for visitors.
- 1.6 That a review of the level of advertising be undertaken to:
  - Ensure sufficient targeted campaigns are being carried out;
  - Make more use of the Councils newspaper to highlight local events;
  - Provide more information to event organisers on what the District has to offer.
- 1.7 That more work be done on marketing the area as a package to encourage people to stay overnight in the District.
- 1.8 That the rural location of the District and its proximity as the gateway into the Peak District and major attractions like Chatsworth House be promoted more.
- 1.9 That work to increase awareness of the opportunities for local businesses to gain benefit from the events the Council puts on, including accommodation availability and benefits for traders be undertaken.
- 1.10 That consideration be given to whether there is more the service could do to take advantage of the opportunities to develop better links with the local private sector Tourism related Business.
- 1.11 That the service continues to find effective ways to identify the needs of service users.
- 1.12 That the Council promote greater awareness of the Tourism service amongst Council Members.

## **2. Introduction**

- 2.1 At its meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> August, 2013 the Economic Regeneration, Skills and Environment Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of Tourism.
- 2.2 It was felt timely to review whether the operation of Tourism within the District was fit for purpose as new arrangements for delivery of the service have been put in place with Bolsover District Council. Prior to 2013 North East Derbyshire District Council's tourism function had been delivered by a service level agreement with Chesterfield Borough Council at a cost of £29,750 per year, half of which was to support staffing costs. A number of factors contributed to the changing service delivery including the new joint Strategic Alliance, a requirement to make savings, changes in business needs, intelligence, funding support and partnership opportunity.
- 2.3 The Committee recognised the work that was currently being done in this area and the level of resource available. The recommendations within the report aimed to enhance the current approach the Council is taking with partners to maximise the benefits of tourism to the local economy.

## **3. Scope of Review**

3.1 The review aimed to:

- Review what service was being provided
- Consider whether the new arrangements are fit for purpose and Value for Money
- Consider whether we are maximizing the economic benefits of tourism within the District
- To consider any improvements that could be made to the service.

## **4. Method of Review**

- 4.1 The review panel met on five occasions to consider the scope of the review, key issues they wanted to discuss and key people they wished to interview.
- 4.2 Evidence was gathered in a variety of ways including written sources and interviews with a range of officers who are involved with the Tourism service both directly and indirectly. Councillor J Windle, the Chair of the Committee, and Councillor B Rice attended the Chesterfield Area Mini Tourism Conference. A questionnaire was also circulated to members of the Peak Borders Tourism forum to gather their views on how businesses viewed the service.

## **5. Evidence and Research**

5.1 The following documents were considered as part of the review:

- The Visitor Economy: A Potential Powerhouse of Local Growth – Local Government Association;
- Presentation by Theresa Garrod – Tourism Projects Officer entitled Growth of the Local Visitor Economy;
- Analysis of LEADER Programme -Tourism themed/linked projects in North East Derbyshire Area;
- How's Business in Tourism? Survey Results April 2012 to March 2013;
- Steam Report 2011;
- Report – Global Tourism Solutions (UK) Ltd;
- Walking Festival Survey 2013 Report;
- Details of Chesterfield Area Mini Conference.

## **6. Key Findings**

6.1 The Committee quickly recognised the value of Tourism to the District. Visitor spend in the Chesterfield area is £364 million with visitor numbers of 8,907,000. However, 91% of these visitors do not stop overnight so there is potential to encourage some of this percentage to stay overnight. The industry supports 5,293 jobs. In relation to North East Derbyshire specifically the 2011 steam report quantifies the economic impact generated to be £117.38 million, with 2,995.2 tourists and employment supported by Tourism Activity of 1,780 full time jobs.

### **6.2 Strengths**

6.2.1 It became clear that whilst public funding is currently challenging the Council is still keen to enable the visitor economy to support itself and provide benefits to the local economy. The dedicated officer time for the Tourism officer at North East is ten hours. However, there was a strong feeling of optimism in the service that they could deliver a good service. Working in partnership was seen as key to being able to use resources well to maximise benefits, including officer resource.

6.2.2 Several stakeholders commented that the District had good accommodation provision. This provision was varied in size and rating which was an advantage as it covered a wide market. Details were provided of recent additional provision and future plans which would add to the existing offer. It was suggested that the area would benefit from additional campsites.

6.2.3 A number of stakeholders commented that the area does not have numerous iconic landmarks itself but does have some well known attractions including Chatsworth House and Hardwick Hall on its doorstep. This makes it a convenient base, being situated on the edge of the peak district, to visit many of these attractions. Potentially there was a massive catchment area.

6.2.4 With regard to partnership working evidence was provided of how the Council was working with the Chesterfield Area Tourism and the Peak District Tourist

Board to enhance the opportunities for the growth of the visitor economy. This was working well and examples were provided of future work over the coming months which included:

- The creation of a Mini Guide and content for the Visit Chesterfield website;
- Attending the Tourism Forum and input into the Industry Newsletter for Chesterfield Area Tourism;
- Promoting the Walking Festival and Food and Drink events;
- Supporting the Peak District as a Destination of Distinction through billboard campaigns;
- Seeking additional funding opportunities through Leader and the People and Places Fund.

6.2.5 The link between tourism and economic regeneration was raised by several stakeholders as being important in relation to Tourism. The committee received evidence that the Joint Economic Development Strategy included clear aims to strengthen North East Derbyshire as a visitor destination and provide a high quality Tourist Information Service. It also intends to develop a strategic marketing programme to increase visitor numbers and support the development of the area's tourism product and infrastructure. Within the adopted local plan (2005) there is a section on employment development and Tourism which recognised the role of tourism in diversification of the local economy and job provision. This is linked to the Council's Tourism Strategy and focuses on improved visitor infrastructure, facilities and promotion. The Assistant Director of Planning and Environmental Health stressed that an important consideration going forward is that new tourism development must have regard to the character of the area and not have unacceptable environmental consequences.

6.2.6 The emerging local plan supports the encouragement of rural diversification that recognises the District's tourism assets. It also identifies Chesterfield Canal, Sutton Scarsdale Hall, Hardwick Hall and open nature of Peak Fringe countryside as key assets. Additionally the role of the west of the District in providing opportunities for tourism is recognised and strengthening its role as the Gateway to the Peak.

6.2.7 Evidence was provided by the Programme Officer of the LEADER Programme on how successful the project had been in supporting Tourism in the District. It had established links with Visit Peak District and Visit Derbyshire. He also provided details of businesses that had been supported by LEADER grant funding. One example provided of where investment in a project on the edge of the District had helped bring visitors to the area was the refurbishment of the Hardwick visitor centre. He advised that the District had received over 70,000 additional day visitors per year because of the investment made by the LEADER Programme funding. He added that tourism was a major part of the LEADER Programme in the Bolsover North East Derbyshire area.

6.2.8 He also advised the committee that he regularly went out to talk with businesses to understand their needs. This awareness of the need to increase understanding of business needs to shape future project development and funding allocations was considered essential.

6.2.9 The majority of stakeholders when asked felt that the Council was working corporately across the departments to maximise the potential benefits to the local economy from Tourism. However, they recognised how important this aspect was and wanted to ensure that this continued given the current economic climate the Authority had to work within.

### **6.3 Areas for Improvement**

6.3.1 Opportunities for growth had been identified in food and drink, short break packages and dispersal of visitors to do more and spend more when they visit. It was felt that more needs to be done to encourage people to stay in the District because of the strong accommodation provision and accessibility to peak attractions. Several stakeholders raised this issue and stated that we could maximise this potential more.

6.3.2 Whilst the area has no major attractions it did have other attractions that need to be marketed more actively. The need to link attractions/facilities as a package was highlighted by several stakeholders as well as taking advantage of the District's proximity to other tourist attractions in neighbouring areas like Bolsover.

6.3.3 It was recognised that understanding the need of users of the service including visitors was essential if we are to improve what we have to offer. Evidence was provided of data being collected to understand the needs of the service users better. The 2011 tourism economic impact assessments provided evidence on spend in terms of accommodation, food and drink, recreation, shopping and transport. However, due to funding available this information was only collected every three years. Results of surveys were also provided which included the 2013 walking festival which demonstrated that feedback and evaluation of events was taking place.

6.3.4 The 'How's Business in Tourism 2012 to 2013 survey highlighted interaction with tourism businesses. The survey provided information on business levels, how marketing and promotion was rated, including the DMO website, Chesterfield Visitor Information Centre, Visit Chesterfield information website and their future business plans. The facilities listed are used to promote tourism for the broader area but include North East Derbyshire District. Whilst the results demonstrated a fairly high level of satisfaction with these facilities there was evidence that 20% had never visited the visit peak district website, 16% had not seen a copy of the visitor guide, 20% were unaware of marketing activity and 24% had not visited the Tourist Information Centre. Therefore there were still improvements that could be made to raise awareness. Other comments received from businesses surveyed included more press coverage, more targeted marketing and the need to attract more overnight stays.

6.3.5 The Council also needs to consider whether there is more it can do to take advantage of the opportunity to develop better links with local private sector tourism related businesses.



- 6.3.6 In support of the wider tourism facilities the Council also used its own website to promote tourism. However this was an area the review panel felt could be further improved. The information on the website was limited and was not being used to its full potential. It was felt that the website could promote more specifically our local visitor economy. Examples provided were Chatsworth House and Hardwick Hall that attract thousands of visitors each year but comments suggested that the website did not take advantage of this by promoting it prominently that these were within easy travelling distance from North East Derbyshire. Additionally the Council had produced a number of Audio Trails that had been very successful and received national acclaim. Extension of the walking connections from East to West of the District would add to this. Increased promotion using the Councils website of the areas attractions would be beneficial. The Committee also felt that specifically in relation to the Council's newspaper more could be done to raise awareness of attractions for local people.
- 6.3.7 A number of other suggestions were made by stakeholders, including the provision of a database of local events which the Council could use to promote its area including provision of good accommodation and more work with local traders and providers to improve and develop tourism locally. The Assistant Director of Leisure stated that improvements could be made from linking projects up such as leisure centres, the Dronfield Brass Band Contest, swimming galas and disability basketball. He felt that making people more aware of things happening in the district would strengthen North East Derbyshire as a visitor destination. Other suggestions included more contact with parish councils on what they had to offer, possible joint initiatives with parish councils, and the need to promote greater awareness of the Tourism service amongst Council Members.
- 6.3.8 Another issue raised was the need to ensure that the links with planning should be maintained as there was some evidence that they have decreased since the new arrangements.

## **7. Conclusions**

- 7.1 The review concluded that a great deal of successful work was being undertaken by the Tourism service with the reduction in local authority budgets partnership working was considered key to ensure the best use of resources. The Committee recognised that Tourism can bring significant economic benefits to the area. For this reason the Council should ensure that we maximise the benefits and seek to maintain a high profile for the service.

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## **8 Stakeholders Engaged During Review**

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| James Arnold             | - Joint Assistant Director of Planning and Environment |
| Councillor Graham Baxter | - Leader – North East Derbyshire District Council      |
| Sonia Coleman            | - Economic Development and Investment Manager          |
| Helen Fairfax            | - Planning Policy Team Leader                          |
| Theresa Garrod           | - Tourism Projects Officer                             |
| Lee Hickin               | - Joint Assistant Director Leisure                     |
| Richard Madin            | - Programme Officer – BNED LEADER Programme            |

Members of the Peak Borders Tourism Forum