

SUNDERLAND DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN AND REGIONAL UPDATE

LINK TO WORK PROGRAMME:

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CITY SERVICES

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: Prosperous City, Attractive and Inclusive City

**CORPORATE PRIORITIES: Delivering Customer Focussed Services
Being One Council
Efficient and Effective
Improving partnership working to deliver 'One City'**

1.0 WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO COMMITTEE?

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the development of a Sunderland Destination Management Plan (DMP) and regional opportunities.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Sunderland's DMP will set clear aims and objectives for the development of Sunderland as a visitor destination. It will seek to ensure tourism is supporting the Sunderland Strategy specifically the strategic priorities of 'Prosperous City' and 'Attractive and Inclusive City'. Developing the city from a visitor's perspective will also help improve the lives of residents.

2.2 The Sunderland DMP will be an important tool to encourage support in any future funding bids and to focus effort and resources on key priority areas.

3.0 THE NEED FOR THIS PLAN

3.1 The Sunderland DMP will develop an action plan for the whole partnership of businesses, individuals and organisations involved in delivering the visitor experience in Sunderland.

3.2 This plan will ensure that all partners and organisations involved in tourism development have an overall understanding of how the city is supporting and improving the visitor experience, as well as clear, planned objectives and actions which partners can achieve by working together in a coordinated manner.

3.3 By being focussed on the clear objectives of increasing the number of visitors and spend levels, businesses in the city will reap rewards and the overall experience will improve for residents, visitors, students and people working in the city.

3.4 This strategic document will include aspirations and visions for the future, and will also include key actions and stepping stones in order to realise the future by developing and understanding the tourism potential and ensuring that the uniqueness and identity of Sunderland is embraced.

- 3.5 By using the action plan and programme of activities outlined in the DMP, we will be able to track the changes taking place within the city by using market research intelligence carried out by regional partners such as One North East and Tourism Tyne and Wear.
- 3.6 This will be a five-year plan from 2010 to 2015, however delivery and action plans will be updated annually.

4.0 REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE - The North East England Visitor Economy Strategy

- 4.1 The North East England Visitor Economy Strategy 2010 – 2020 is currently in consultation draft. The strategy is set within the context of the Regional Economic Strategy (2006 – 2016), which identifies Tourism and Hospitality as one of the nine key economic sectors.
- 4.2 This document sets out a vision for the region's tourism economy in 2020 along with objectives and areas for action for the host of businesses and organisations involved in the delivery of the tourism experience. The consultation period for the strategy commenced on Thursday 10 December 2009 finishing on Sunday 7 March 2010.
- 4.3 Key opportunities within this strategy which support the development of Sunderland as a visitor destination and the focus will be around the following areas:
- Iconic landmarks that help create positive awareness of the region
 - Emerging cultural urban destinations, with potential for stimulating leisure breaks and day visits
 - World Heritage sites and other heritage themes as key attractors
 - Strong higher education sector resources for leisure and business tourism
 - Outstanding sports venues as locations for events
- 4.4 Within the visioning section, the strategy recognises changes which will take place from now until 2020 in Sunderland. Building strong foundations based on quality of place and image will redefine it as an excellent place to live, work, play and study. Events programmes, cultural and leisure opportunities will offer an extensive choice of entertainment and recreation.
- 4.5 The concept of Sunderland as an 'urban playground' is used, which has been questioned as it does not support the Sunderland Image Strategy. The phrase 'Cities with Soul' also requires clarity as this does not differentiate the cities of the North East with other cities, or support the complementary positioning of Sunderland in the North East.
- 4.6 Specific elements have been identified which will guide future investment, many of which support opportunities and product in Sunderland:
- A liberating experience - renew, relax, discover
 - Cities with soul (requires clarification as stated in 4.5)
 - Distinctive, independent character
 - Spacious landscapes
 - Special places to meet
 - People with passion and pride
 - Vibrant cultural scene

5.0 SUNDERLAND DMP – CORE CONTENT

- 5.1 The Sunderland DMP is currently in draft and input is being sought through key stakeholder meetings with a view to having the plan complete by July 2010.
- 5.2 The plan is not being developed in isolation. The plan will be in line with the Economic Masterplan for Sunderland and looks to support the key components set out in aim 3, 'a connected waterfront city centre' as well as other linked activities i.e. events development.
- 5.3 The plan is being developed to reflect the North East Visitor Strategy which has highlighted a number of core product themes:
- History and heritage
 - Coast and country
 - City / urban culture
 - A place to meet and do business
- 5.4 The plan will also look to reflect actions (again reflected in the North East Visitor Economy Strategy) to grow and further strengthen the offer through:
- Legibility – sense of destination
 - Adding depth and connectivity (e.g. World Heritage/Durham)
 - Improving quality
 - Developing interaction for customers
 - Developing new product offers
 - Sustaining resources and assets
 - Events and festivals
 - Retail
 - Evening entertainment
 - Food and drink
 - Accommodation
 - Transport
- 5.5 The Sunderland DMP will look to support the following measurable, key strategic priorities:
- Maintain and increase the existing day visitors and VFR (Visiting Friends and Relatives) market
 - Increase spend per head
 - Increase overnight stays
 - Increase employment in tourism
 - Improve quality (accommodation and attractions)
 - Increase the number of hotel beds in the city
- 5.6 These key strategic priorities cannot be achieved without major activity concentrating on changing the outdated perceptions from which the city still suffers, and in order to change the status quo, there must be suitable resources in place. Therefore this plan will suggest

the development of a dedicated agency or partnership with resources to proactively improve perceptions and promote and develop the destination.

- 5.7 Meetings have taken place with One North East's Head of Marketing, Tania Robinson, where opportunities have been highlighted surrounding destination marketing which we are currently investigating as part of the plan:
 - 5.7.1 Sunderland's Tourism Team will look to Durham as a significant partner, particularly with regard to the heritage product. Durham also plays a significant part in the current World Cup 2018 Host City Bid as well as short break packages.
 - 5.7.2 Sunderland has a good travel trade/group product. There are new activities and promotions taking place directly through One North East as well as through the ATP (Area Tourism Partnership) and this will be considered for inclusion.
 - 5.7.3 The regional tourism team and the Tyne and Wear ATP are improving digital communications to customers which will form the basis of a specific Sunderland Strategy and further marketing opportunities
 - 5.7.4 It is evident that events are highly significant and act as key attractors into the North East and Sunderland, therefore the Tourism Team will continue to work with the Events Team to ensure that events are developed with the incoming visitor as key audiences and they are marketed through the regional Marketing Team as well as internally.
 - 5.7.5 Sunderland is clearly seen as an 'Emerging Destination' therefore there is a real opportunity for the city to develop into a lead destination in the future.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Members are requested to note the report for information and advise if they are in agreement with the core content to date and provide any comments/feedback.