

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL SERVICES

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS - POST EVENT 2008

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on Heritage Open Days 2008.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Heritage Open Days (HODs) is the nation's biggest free celebration of England's fantastic architecture, history and culture. It has taken place annually in the UK each September since 1994. The weekend of heritage is part of European Heritage Open Days, a Council of Europe initiative, where 49 countries allow the public a chance to visit heritage sites that are usually not open, free of charge. It is a once-a-year opportunity to discover hidden architectural treasures and enjoy a wide range of tours, events and activities.
- 2.2 HODs are co-ordinated nationally by the Civic Trust in partnership with English Heritage. Last year's event in 2007 proved to be a huge success. Final figures are not yet available for the 2008 HODs event at national level, but general feedback to date suggests that the event continues to develop and attract new visitors.

3.0 TYNE AND WEAR HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2008

- 3.1 This was the seventh annual Tyne and Wear HODs event. The 2008 weekend of heritage was organised by the Tyne and Wear HODs Steering Group, which is led by the Historic Environment Section within Newcastle City Council. The Councils of Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland along with the North of England Civic Trust, Sunderland Heritage Forum, Newcastle Association of City Guides, English Heritage, NewcastleGateshead Initiative and volunteers work in partnership to assist the process, but the event is only made possible by the generous time and effort of all the volunteers and staff at the participating buildings, tours and events.
- 3.2 This year the event took place between Thursday 11 and Sunday 14 September and 191 buildings, tours and activities took part across the Tyne and Wear region.
- 3.3 Year upon year the Tyne and Wear event has developed and improved in either the number of participating properties, tours and activities, or the total number of visits in person. Last year, in 2007, the event

surpassed all records and involved 184 properties, which received an excellent 44,603 visits.

- 3.4 Visitor figures for the 2008 HOD's event have been collated and early indications confirm that the 'weekend of heritage' has again been a great success. A total of 46,853 visits were made to the 191 properties, tours and events held across Tyne and Wear. An estimate has been calculated in relation to those events where visitor figures were unavailable. As figures have not yet been produced at a national level it is not known how this compares with other regions across the country.

4.0 SUNDERLAND'S HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

- 4.1 Sunderland City Council continues to work towards improving the visitor experience in respect of Heritage Open Days and is continuing to develop additional programme and activities in order to widen audience participation.
- 4.2 For the 2008 event visitor figures to date show that over 9,136 visits were made across the city to the 53 participating venues/events.
- 4.3 Some of the highlights of the Heritage Open Days programme included events and activities which were held across the city:
- Class visits with local schools were arranged at Washington Millennium Library, Hendon Library, Southwick Library and Houghton Library to look at the local history displays and to take part in a learning session with local historian and folk singer Keith Gregson. Comments received included feedback from a schoolteacher who commended the event by saying it was *"Fantastic, a super way for children to learn about history"*.
 - A new element to Sunderland's programme was the establishment of a bus tour to Sunderland's 8 Football Grounds, which had 20 participants, all of whom enjoyed visiting the former SAFC sites around Sunderland with commentary given by football historians Rob Mason and Mike Gibson.
 - St Andrew's Church in Roker is described as the 'Arts and crafts Cathedral of the North' with many fascinating features and of great historical importance. During Heritage Open Days approximately 95 visitors enjoyed visiting the church.
 - A vintage bus tour was organised with colleagues from Tyne and Wear Museums. The tour included, Fulwell Mill, Washington 'F' Pit and Bowes Railway. A clippie mat craft session was held in the visitor centre of Fulwell Mill, which had very positive feedback, such

as, 'tour of mill was great fun and whole family loved clippie mat making'.

- 4.4 In addition to the high visitor figures for the event, the general feedback from volunteers and visitors has been very positive. Comments made through the feedback include:

"Felt quite emotional and nostalgic about the past - seeing the mining banners and marching brass band. (Washington Millennium Centre)

"Excellent, another please so I can bring my daughter along." (Alice in Sunderland talk)

"Tour of Mill was great fun and whole family loved clippy mat craft." (Fulwell Windmill) - visitors from Atlanta, USA.

5.0 CONTRIBUTIONS/SPONSORSHIP

- 5.1 In 2007, to supplement the financial contributions made by each of the participating authorities for the development and promotion of the event, the Tyne and Wear steering group for HODs was fortunate enough to secure external funding from The Northern Rock Foundation. This has resulted in a total grant of £19,500 over a 3-year period from 2007 – 2009. An allocation of £6,500 was allocated to 2008 event.

6.0 MARKETING PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION

- 6.1 As with previous years, a local Tyne and Wear HODs booklet was produced by the North of England Civic Trust (25,000 copies) which were available from Tourist Information Centres and Libraries throughout Tyne and Wear from the beginning of August 2008. Redevelopments were made to the booklet to improve the planning tool, to enable visitors to plan the events they wished to attend. The feedback form was also simplified for ease of use.
- 6.2 In addition to the booklet, the Tyne and Wear HODs website (managed by the Historic Environment Section in Newcastle City Council) was also revised.
- 6.3 The event was extensively publicised and promoted through the marketing section within Culture and Tourism and received widespread coverage by the local media. The objectives were to gain maximum publicity pre and during the event whilst ensuring to promote Sunderland City Council as co-ordinator of the event.
- 6.4 Between July and September there were 14 separate articles featuring Heritage Open Days programme in the local press. These included the Sunderland Echo, Washington Star, The Journal and the Evening

Chronicle. The total value of free media coverage was £14,700. Each venue or activity was added to www.sunderlandevents.com website with links to the regional and national Heritage Open Days websites. Articles promoting Heritage Open Days also featured in Sunrise and Sunderland Visitor Guide, which goes out to all households across the City.

7.0 HERITAGE OPEN DAYS REGIONAL LAUNCH

7.1 In addition to the general media coverage, the Regional Launch of HODs was held at Saltwell Towers in Gateshead and was hosted by Gateshead Council and Tyne and Wear Museums. The event was attended by John Grundy, council members and senior officers from each of the district authorities, sponsors, representatives from regional and local organisations and groups, and volunteers from the participating properties/activities.

8.0 HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2009

8.1 The Civic Trust has confirmed that the 2009 event will take place from 10– 13 September 2009. It is intended that the Historic Environment Section will continue to lead the organisation of the event in Newcastle and the co-ordination of the event within Tyne and Wear with assistance from other members of the Steering Group.

8.2 The Culture and Tourism Section of Community and Cultural Services Directorate will establish internal Heritage Open Day meetings in January 2009 in order to continue to develop new venues, programme and activities.

9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The cost of the Tyne and Wear HODs 2008 publicity and launch was approximately £11,000. This was funded by contributions from the participating authorities (£500 per authority) along with the very generous grant aid/donations from the Northern Rock Foundation.

9.2 The Culture and Tourism Section reported expenditure of £2,779. This included:

- Artist fees for programme within Churches/libraries/Fulwell Windmill
- Bus Hire for Tours across the city
- Houghton Brass at Washington Millennium Centre
- Marketing and Publicity (includes Sunderland specific and contribution to Tyne and Wear Marketing Material)

9.3 It is anticipated that the Tyne and Wear HODs 2009 event will be funded by contributions from the five Councils and additional external sponsorship.

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Members are asked to note the content of this report.

