

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CITY SERVICES

ROLE OF TOURISM AND EVENTS IN SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES – POLICY REVIEW 2010/11

15 FEBRUARY 2011

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: PROSPEROUS CITY

CORPORATE PRIORITIES: CI01: Delivery Customer Focused Services, CI02: Being ‘One Council’ CI03: Efficient and Effective Council, CI04: Improving partnership working to deliver ‘One City’

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members of the work ongoing within Culture and Tourism with regard to the Tourism and Events offer across the city and to provide evidence for the review the committee is undertaking in relation to culture supporting sustainable communities.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Department for Culture, Media and Sport definition of culture includes Tourism, Festivals and Attractions and recognises that culture is not confined to dedicated cultural facilities, such as theatres, and the people who use them. Just as important are less formal cultural activities which take place in local communities.
- 2.2 It is also recognised that cultural activities such as tourism attractions, festivals and events build local pride and support the development of functional, safe and inclusive neighbourhoods.

3.0 ROLE OF TOURISM AND EVENTS IN SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

- 3.1 Sunderland is a city rich in history and heritage with strong values and aspirations. It is a city by the sea surrounded by attractive green open spaces.
- 3.2 With an innovative University at its heart, Sunderland is currently undergoing a massive and unique transformation. The city is aiming to create a modern, attractive environment for the twenty first century. This includes the provision of high quality leisure and sporting facilities, the opening up to the public of its dramatic riverside frontage, the provision of relaxing squares in a revitalised city centre with independent shopping and improving cultural opportunities. These are all brought alive by a developing programme of festivals, events and creative arts which animate the city. Producing an increasingly attractive and enjoyable city in which to live, work, study, and play/relax as well as to visit.

- 3.3 Over recent years, Sunderland has seen significant investment in leisure and business tourism activity. The table below gives an outline of the current scale of tourism in Sunderland.

Visitor impact in Sunderland 2009			
	Staying visitor	Day visitors	All visitors
Visitor Numbers	651,320	8.42 million	9.08 million
Spend	£81.76 million	£260.38 million	£342.14 million

- 3.4 The main visitor drivers for Sunderland currently are:-

- Sunderland AFC
- Sunderland Empire Theatre
- Sunderland University
- Shopping – Day Visitors
- Significant events, particularly the Sunderland International Airshow and music concerts at the Stadium of Light.

- 3.5 Some key examples of Sunderland’s tourism and events offer are detailed below:-

3.5.1 **Maritime and coastal activities** – Sunderland has two main beaches, Roker and Seaburn (both Blue Flag) and is the only ‘city by the sea’ in North East England. The area was a traditional seafront destination and the coast today still attracts both residents and visitors who are able to take part in a wide range of recreational opportunities (such as walking and cycling) and watersports activities particularly focussed at the Marina. It also provides an outdoor events space which provides a dramatic backdrop to events such as the Sunderland International Airshow which attracts local, regional and national visitors.

3.5.2 **Events** – Sunderland has a strong festivals and events programme which is supported by the ‘See Sunderland’ campaign: ‘share, experience and enjoy’. There are currently a number of key annual events which include the Sunderland International Airshow, the Sunderland International Friendship Festival, and creative events which include the Shine Festival as well as programmes such as Sunderland Live which looks to animate the streets with music.

3.5.3 Events are also organised based on the city’s heritage including battle re-enactments and the Washington Heritage Festival aiming to draw in visitors from the city, the North East region and beyond. The Stadium of Light has proved itself to be viable for large scale events with concerts by Take That and Oasis in 2009 and Pink in 2010 and with a further programme of events recently announced for 2011.

3.5.4 As well as the large scale events highlighted above, Sunderland City Council manages and supports a wide range of community and local based events

including Houghton Feast, Penshaw Bowl, Independence Day Celebrations at Washington Old Hall and the Boxing Day Dip at the seafront.

3.5.5 Sunderland City Council delivers and supports a wide range of events which recognise and celebrate the social diversity of the city which is reflected in the programme as appropriate. Other events organised by individual services include Chinese New Year, Holocaust Memorial Day and Black History Month.

3.5.6 Sunderland City Council Events Team also provide advice and support to individuals and community groups in the planning and development of local and community events and festivals.

3.5.7 **The Green Environment and Natural Heritage** - There are a number of award winning parks and gardens and green open spaces including Mowbray Park, Roker Park and Barnes Park, (the latter currently undergoing a £3.3 million refurbishment which is due for completion in 2011) and there are also significant sites providing experience of the natural habitat including the recently redeveloped Washington Wetland Centre; Herrington Country Park; James Steel Park, Washington; Hetton Lyons Country Park and Rainton Meadows Nature Reserve. The creation of a new country park on the site of the former Lambton Cokeworks to the south of Shiney Row is also nearing completion.

3.5.8 **Empire Theatre** – The Empire Theatre is a key component of the Sunderland tourism offer and attracts significant numbers of visitors from the city and outside the region to both theatre productions and concerts. More locally the Royalty theatre in Sunderland provides regular performances by amateur drama groups.

3.5.9 **Retail** – The main retail offer is concentrated around The Bridges and the emerging Sunnyside ‘designer / independent boutique’ area which provides a credible and growing retail offer. This has a developing quality restaurant, cafe and bar quarter supported by a developing communications plan and signposting initiative. Shopping remains a priority for residents and visitors to an area. Business support is key to ensuring that as many businesses as possible remain trading, as well as providing support to new, developing and or extending businesses.

3.5.10 **Evening Economy** - Sunderland’s nightlife, in the main, concentrates on a number of streets in the city centre giving a compact offer. The recently launched Sunderland Economic Masterplan seeks to increase the number of people living and working in the city centre which in turn will help to combat the ‘closed’ feeling from which it suffers between 5pm and 7pm.

3.5.11 Further key areas of tourism activity which are discussed in more detail in separate reports include Arts and Creative Development, Museums, History, Heritage and the built environment and Sport and Leisure

3.6 **Tourist Information Centre** – The Tourist Information Centre provides an information service to both residents and visitors. Key roles include promoting attractions, events and festivals across the city, providing advice and information on places to visit and things to do, providing an accommodation

booking service and acting as booking agents for local events and community venues.

3.7 Tourism Development - The draft Sunderland Destination Management Plan outlines a vision for the further development of tourism in Sunderland.

3.7.1 “Sunderland will be renowned as North East England’s city by the sea. Its cultural experience and refreshing attitude to life will attract leisure and business visitors from all over the UK and from overseas.

Sunderland will offer a year-round city experience combined with the benefits of clean, green spaces and attractive coastal scenery. The city’s proud heritage, cultural attractions, events and visitor facilities will be underpinned by first class customer services.”

3.7.2 The Plan also outlines a number of strategic objectives including:

- Sustaining the number of existing day visitors
- Attracting more overnight visitors
- Increasing spend per head
- Increasing employment in tourism
- Improving the quality of the tourism product
- Improving perceptions

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

4.1 The city council has recognised that, if the potential for Sunderland to be an important visitor destination can be developed and maintained it would be likely to generate substantial direct and indirect economic benefits to the city and the north east region. As well as benefits for the city through visitor expenditure, tourism has the potential to stimulate regeneration and investment in, and awareness of, Sunderland as a great place to study, live and work.

4.2 With an increasing emphasis on ensuring that all services maximise value for money and ensure efficiencies whilst reducing costs in response to the current economic climate, the tourism service is reviewing its current delivery and examining its core business. This includes reviews of current workforce, the location of services and all areas of operational and service delivery.

4.3 The future of regional and sub-regional tourism is also currently uncertain. With the withdrawal of ONE funding for Area Tourism Partnerships Tourism Tyne and Wear will cease to exist from April 2011. Discussions are currently ongoing as to future tourism development and it is hoped that within Tyne and Wear the five local authorities will continue to be able to work together on a project by project basis.

4.4 In response to the current economic climate and the need to identify efficiencies and ensure value for money a review is currently being undertaken of the events calendar for the city. The review is examining a wide range of factors taking into consideration the number of visitors attracted to each event,

the potential economic benefits brought to the city, the cost of delivery and the resources required.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 The information provided above highlights the work that is currently ongoing in relation to tourism and events. This work directly supports the development of sustainable communities through:

- Creating places where people want to live and work
- Creating employment opportunities
- Creating quality environments
- Creating a vibrant city where residents are informed about and able to participate in a wide range of cultural opportunities.
- Creating opportunities for individuals and groups to meet and participate in joint activities
- Creating opportunities for individuals and groups from minority groups to highlight and celebrate their identities

5.2 Tourism and Events also contribute to the wider education agenda, using activities as a link into lifelong learning through engaging communities in the development and delivery of programmes.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report.