

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CITY SERVICES

HISTORY AND HERITAGE UPDATE – POLICY REVIEW

1.0 WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO THE COMMITTEE?

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members of the work ongoing within Culture and Tourism with regard to the Heritage 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 Heritage is an important element of the city's character – Sunderland has a distinct heritage through which the city achieves its sense of pride. Heritage encompasses everything that relates to the origins of people or a community and their cultural identity. This pride is based on our character and our traditions, including the distinct identity of specific communities and the cultural traditions of our people.
- 2.2 A sense of place is created through heritage activities and in turn a sense of place refers to the satisfaction felt by people about where they live and a sense of being part of a community.
- 2.3 A local building or monument highly regarded and recognised by people can also create a stronger sense of place. In turn a stronger sense of place is widely seen to help people's well-being and also to be important for the social cohesion of communities. The popularity of TV programmes such as "Who Do You Think You Are?" has led to an increase in the number of people tracing their family history and also visiting places associated with their family, again further enhancing a person's sense of identity.
- 2.4 Recent evidence also shows that investing in heritage not only improves quality of life, it also makes sound economic sense. A report, prepared by English Heritage shows there was a 10% increase in the number of visits to historic sites in the North East this year and that membership of historic environment organisations continues to rise. The report also suggests that by investing in historic attractions, income generation can increase.
- 2.4 The City Council is committed to supporting heritage initiatives and currently this area of work is delivered through City Services, supported by two dedicated Cultural Heritage Officers (25 and 22 hours each) and staffing associated with the World Heritage project, managed through the City Council on behalf of the World Heritage Partnership. The Council also has a dedicated building conservation team, within the Office of the Chief Executive to support the built heritage agenda across the city.

2.5 The key priority for heritage in Sunderland is to celebrate, conserve and promote the city's heritage to inspire the future.

The key areas of heritage can be broken down as:-

- Industrial Heritage
- Coastal Heritage
- Collections
- Natural Heritage
- Community Projects
- Built Heritage
- Sporting Heritage

3.0 CURRENT POSITION/OVERVIEW

3.1 **Heritage Open Days 2010** was another successful weekend of opportunity to visit heritage sites and to take part in the many activities on offer within the venue that participated in this important event. This year saw 47 buildings and varying events taking place in Sunderland with approximately 7,500 visits from people of all ages. *Although visitor figures are down slightly from previous years there has been very positive feedback which includes:*

Houghton Hillside Cemetery Display - 'This was a comprehensive display. There were friendly and informative people on hand to talk about the cemetery, as well as guide visitors round this historically important church.'

North East Aircraft Museum - 'I have driven past the signs for this Museum for years, but never visited it before. Glad I made the effort, very interesting, containing many exhibits - visited with children, they were excited and really enjoyed looking at all the planes'.

3.2 **Local Studies** is dedicated to the collection of local information, and works towards ensuring the ongoing collection of history in Sunderland. Demand for this service has continued to grow over recent years, in relation to family history, and users continue to value the service provided. Members will be aware of the recent review carried out in this area, and Officers are now working to implement the positive recommendations that resulted from the review. This includes:

- Appointment of a Local Studies Manager to include a more strategic overview of local studies and heritage provision and to develop outreach provision
- Courses and Classes relating to Local History be extended to out of hours (including evenings and weekends)
- Development of Volunteers and User Groups to assist with service improvements

- 3.3 Fulwell Windmill** – continues to be one of the most renowned landmarks within the city. Open on a part time basis, the Mill continues to be supported through the Friends of Fulwell Mill, who regularly support staff in its operation.

Visitor comments include:

“Absolutely beautifully kept and very interesting. Thank you all involved in keeping this masterpiece of history alive” – Joanne Gardner – Glasgow

“Thoroughly enjoyed the guided tour – ashamed of the number of years it has taken me to visit. Thank you”. A Hutchinson – Cleadon Park

The Mill will shortly be undergoing a review to look at service delivery and opening hours in order to deliver a more effective and efficient service for the future.

- 3.4 Sunderland Heritage Forum** is a partnership of voluntary and professional organisations who continue to be very passionate and committed towards celebrating and protecting Wearside’s heritage. Having been established for over 13 years the Forum continues to work with the City Council to deliver community led projects including Local History Month, Heritage Open Days, History Fairs and Community Lectures, as well as supporting the Heritage agenda through the numerous Friends and volunteer groups across the city.

- 3.5 History Fair 2010** – delivered through the Sunderland Heritage Forum, this bi-annual event once again proved the importance and relevance of the history and heritage agenda in Sunderland. Hosted at the Seaburn Centre, the event attracted over 70 exhibitors and secured almost 4000 visitors to this one day event. The event was a testament to the support of the voluntary sector and by people freely giving their time to support the organisation of the event. The event included magnificent colliery banners, a vintage car, scale model boat and re-enactments from the Roman, Victorian and Civil War eras. Discussions for the 2012 event will be commencing in the near future.

- 3.6 Heritage Events** – 2010 has been a very successful year for the delivery of Heritage based programme with two new events delivered within the city. Hylton Castle re-enactment took place week ending 14/15 August, which resulted in hundreds of families and individuals turning out to see the Roundheads and Cavaliers do battle, re-enacting the English Civil War in the North East from 1644. Comments from visitors included:

"It's absolutely outstanding,"

"It's fantastic that there's a free event like this on and I've heard that people have come from all over the country to be involved." (Mother of six year old child).

The event succeeded in raising both the profile of Hylton Castle as a visitor attraction as well as supporting the Friends of Hylton Castle and Dene in their efforts to see the Castle developed as a community based facility, whilst conserving the history and heritage of the city.

Washington Heritage Festival took place on Saturday 18 September, an event which was created from the enthusiasm and commitment of local and voluntary community groups, funded through the Washington Strategic Initiatives Budget. The event saw over 3,000 visitors to the site at Albany Park and succeeded in creating a community based event, drawing together young and old, participating in community led activity. Programme included a parade of mining banners and colliery bands, school and youth theatre groups, Local History Societies, North East Aircraft Museum, partner agencies including Beamish, North of England Civic Trust, Washington Old Hall and much more. Comments from the event included:

“The atmosphere was excellent and was spot on in bringing local people together to celebrate being local and being part of Washington's rich past”. (Scouts)

Discussions are now underway with the Washington Area Committee to work towards delivery of a 2011 event for the Washington area, having evidenced that the event was successful in bringing together all areas of the community and creating a feeling of involvement and belonging.

- 3.7 Bowes Railway** continues to operate under the Bowes Railway Company, a limited charitable organisation. Having undergone numerous difficulties over recent years, the Railway is now working towards securing its future for the long term. New Chairman Graeme Miller is working with Officers, Members and stakeholders including English Heritage (EH) and the North of England Civic Trust (NECT) to create and implement a sustainable and deliverable action plan, which will enable the Railway to succeed. The Chairman is now actively working to build the capacity of the Board which will be fit for purpose and have the necessary skills and expertise to enable the Railway to become a sustainable and successful organisation.
- 3.8 Area Priorities** – Officers from City Services are also working with area committees to identify and prioritise action plans for the individual areas across the city. Work currently includes a review of the Heritage Offer in the Washington Area, Task and Finish Groups in both the Coalfields and North Areas and a Heritage quarter established for the East Area. Officers will continue to work with Members and voluntary and community groups to develop action plans that will be implemented across the city, to ensure that the city's heritage is conserved, promoted and celebrated for the future.
- 3.9 World Heritage Site Status** - The Wearmouth-Jarrow Nomination File was submitted, on schedule, to English Heritage on 1 October 2010. English Heritage will review the documentation during October and is responsible for recommending the nomination to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Ministerial approval and sign-off will be sought before Christmas 2010. DCMS will forward the Nomination to UNESCO in January 2011. A final decision on awarding World Heritage Status will be made by the UNESCO's World Heritage Committee Summer 2012. Success for Wearmouth-Jarrow would ensure international publicity and would generate significant tourism activity and inward investment for Sunderland and South Tyneside.

Work to improve the actual and virtual visitor experience of the candidate World Heritage Site continues. The Wearmouth-Jarrow website was re-launched on 20 September 2010. New interpretation panels are to be installed across the site from December 2010.

Members will recall a full update of this project was delivered to the Committee at the September 2010 meeting.

4.0 CONCLUSION

4.1 The information provided above highlights the work that is currently ongoing across the city in relation to History and Heritage. It should be noted that evidence already exists to support the fact that history and heritage are important to local economies because it attracts businesses, residents and visitors and that the historic environment plays an important factor when making decisions on where to visit, live or work. (Heritage Counts 2010)

4.2 History and Heritage can also contribute to the wider education agenda, using it as a tool into lifelong learning and acquiring skills that can be transferable in the longer term, as well as engaging young people in heritage based activities.

4.3 The profile of History and Heritage continues to grow not just within the city, but regionally and nationally. The benefits of heritage should not just be seen as economical but importantly how the historic environment impacts on local communities. Evidence shows that by living or having an interest in the built environment strengthens peoples' sense of place, which is very widely seen to helping people's well being and to playing an important factor in the social cohesion of communities.

4.4 We must highlight the important role of the voluntary sector in delivering the heritage agenda within the city. Already there are numerous groups and societies who assist in developing programmes which link communities to their local heritage. In view of the current financial climate we need to engage with the voluntary and community sector in order to secure the historic environment for the future.

4.5 We will continue to work towards ensuring that History and Heritage is embedded in the future development of the city, working with all sectors including community, voluntary, stakeholders, partners, businesses and potential funders.

5.0 RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report and to receive further updates regarding Heritage in Sunderland including Built Heritage and Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums which will be subject to separate reports in the future.

6.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

6.1 Heritage Counts 2010 - England

7.0 GLOSSARY

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

DCMS - Department of Culture, Media and Sport

NECT – North of England Civic Trust

EH – English Heritage

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