

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CITY SERVICES**

**HISTORY AND HERITAGE UPDATE 2010/11**

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on the work ongoing within City Services with regard to the Heritage offer across the city and to provide evidence for the review the Committee has undertaken 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. This pride is based on our character and our traditions, including the distinct identity of specific communities and the cultural traditions of our people. Heritage encompasses everything that relates to the origins of people or a community and their cultural identity.
- 2.2 Heritage activities also create a sense of place through 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.
- 2.3 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 Wearmouth Jarrow 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.
- 2.4 The key priority for heritage in Sunderland is to celebrate, conserve and promote the city's heritage to inspire the future.

The key themes for heritage delivery in Sunderland are:-

- Learning / Education
- Preservation / Conservation
- Promotion

- Voluntary Groups
- Heritage Management

### 3.0 VISION FOR HERITAGE

- 3.1 Culture and Tourism are now looking at options to develop a strategic vision for heritage which would assist in managing expectations across the city.
- 3.2 The vision, whilst realising efficiencies, will be to focus on the development of heritage whilst increasing the delivery through the community and voluntary sector and develop a Heritage Strategy to:
- Inform and influence the Cultural Strategy
  - Promote the Heritage of the city
  - Identify key messages relating to the Heritage of the city
  - Prioritise Heritage Projects across the city
- 3.3 The development of a Heritage Strategy will be led through the City Services Directorate.
- 3.4 A key group to support this work will be the existing 'Heritage in Sunderland (Sunderland Stories) Group', which is a partnership group within the city, working together to develop the city's heritage agenda. The areas of work currently covered include:
- Communication
  - Policy
  - Support
- 3.5 Currently as part of this group work resources have been identified by the University of Sunderland to lead on a mapping exercise, which will assist in the development of the strategy for the city.

### 4.0 CURENT WORK ACROSS THE CITY

- 4.1 **Heritage Open Days 2010** – took place between Thursday 9 and Sunday 12 September and across the North East region. 220 buildings, tours and activities opened their doors or took place free of charge. In Sunderland there were 47 buildings and/or activities which took place with over 7,500 visitors attending over the weekend.

Comments received throughout the weekend included:

*'I've been on many tours but I've never enjoyed any as much as this, it was fascinating. Please open up again so more can enjoy a wonderful experience!'*

*'An excellent tour, guided by someone who knew their subject and was articulate as well as entertaining.'*

For the 2011 event there will be 44 events and activities taking place within the Sunderland area. Some of the new venues and activities for 2011 include a guided walk around the recently developed Elba park, the Quakers meeting house, Sheila Quigley's guided walk entitled - Slaughter in Sunderland and the popular listed pigeon cove at Ryhope.

4.2 **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. Following the review that was carried out by the Scrutiny Committee in 2009 developments in Local Studies include:

- Recruitment and appointment of a Local Studies Manager
- Development of a User Forum for the centre
- Research and development of Social Media
- Research and development of Digitisation Methods
- Ongoing regional partnership development

4.3 **Fulwell Windmill** – continues to be one of the most treasured and well known landmarks within the city. The service continues to be highly valued and offers drop in and group visits. Recent visitor comments include:

*“Superb tour of the Mill and demonstrations – guide was brilliant at engaging the interest of a 3 year old and 2 parents. Very memorable.”*

*Very interesting and informal showing of Mill, enjoyed making flour at the end of the tour, will certainly come again”*

The Mill has also recently worked in partnership with CEED to deliver a very focused volunteer programme, covering a range of practical skills - conservation, traditional woodcraft and horticulture. The Mill now incorporates a sensory garden to the front of the Visitor Centre and the main garden has been developed to grow wheat, incorporate a nature trail and working with willow and wood to develop seating areas and animals.

4.4 **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 14 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. The Forum also supports the Heritage agenda through the numerous Friends and volunteer groups across the city.

Projects delivered through the Forum include Local Heritage Month 2011, which as a bi-annual event saw over 35 heritage events and activities delivered across the city, development of the Sunderland Heritage Forum website which is a local resource to support the heritage agenda within the city and the delivery of a community lectures programme, hosting a range of guest speakers.

The Forum is now also working to deliver the 2012 Sunderland History Fair, which is scheduled to take place on Saturday 2 June 2012. This bi-annual event re-established in 2008 has continued to grow in popularity and brings together the region's history enthusiasts to promote the North East's rich heritage.

- 4.5 **Heritage Events** - continue to be developed within the city, working with the voluntary and community sector. During 2010-11 events included the Washington Heritage Festival which was an event 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)*

The 2011 event which took place on 17 September was as successful as in the previous year with a developed programme being enjoyed by all those visiting the event.

A further event which has been established for 2011 will be the Washington Village Christmas Festival. Funded through the Strategic Initiatives Budget the event is being supported through the City Council during its infancy, having been initiated and led by support from the local community. The event will comprise of music, food and exhibitors, along with local businesses and organisations such as Washington Old Hall and the City's Library Service supporting and contributing to the programme of the event.

Members should note that the above events have in the main been dependent upon securing appropriate funding with a level of in-kind support through relevant Officers within the City Council. It is envisaged that this is likely to continue in respect of 2012 but, due to the increasingly challenging financial climate there needs to be an emphasis upon sourcing alternative ways of enabling activity should it not be possible to secure funding/partnership working to support future heritage activity going forward.

- 4.6 **Bowes Railway** – having suffered during recent years the Railway Company has recently undergone a change in Chairmanship to enable the Railway to move forward as a sustainable and viable visitor attraction. Under the direction of Greame Miller the Railway has successfully managed to secure funding in a number of areas, most importantly securing funding through English Heritage to engage North of England Civic Trust (NECT) to work to strengthen the board and staffing of the Company, help it set out a forward strategy in a new business plan and produce an overall schedule of works and budget costs for the repair of all the historic buildings and structures. NECT's work will culminate in a re-launch of the site. This work is now currently underway and the Railway continues to

move forward, developing its management and governance arrangements along with a full and detailed programme of events.

The Railway also continues to be fully supported through the City Council both financially and through a range of in kind Officer support.

**4.7 Area Priorities** – Culture and Tourism are continuing to work with Members and the voluntary sector to develop the heritage agenda across the city whilst ensuring local priorities are taken into account. Work to date includes:

- Washington – have carried out a Study to consider the feasibility of a heritage agenda/heritage centre as highlighted through the local community. There has also been a Mining Banner Education Project working with local schools in the Washington Area to produce mining banners as part of an intergenerational project.
- Coalfield – identified heritage as a key priority and engaged outside consultants to carry out a study into the heritage provision of the area. On completion of the study a work plan was produced which highlighted a number of high priorities including the appointment of a Community Heritage Worker. The Committee are now working with the North Area Committee to secure a joint post between the two areas in order to move the heritage agenda forward, working closely with local community groups.
- North – as with the Coalfield area heritage was identified as a key priority for the committee, which resulted in a Task and Finish group being established. Working to develop a heritage based action plan for the area, as highlighted above, a joint post is to be created in order to implement the work plan for the area.
- East - The Heritage Quarter is a regeneration project for the East End of Sunderland which is being led by a community based interest group. Agreed and funded through the area committee the project will run for a three year period, engaging both a consultant and a community co-ordinator worker for the East Area of the city. The roles involve fundraising, engaging with public, private and voluntary sector partners and establishing a legal and community framework for future heritage activity. The role of the co-ordinator is to secure a programme of community heritage activities and promote and publicise heritage events in the East End.

**4.8 World Heritage Site Status** - The Nomination Dossier for the Twin Monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow was signed off by the UK Government and submitted in January 2011, meeting the UNESCO deadline. This makes Wearmouth-Jarrow the official UK Nomination for World Heritage Site status in 2011.

In March 2011, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport received confirmation that the Nomination has passed its technical check and will proceed to full evaluation.

The evaluation of the bid falls into two parts:

- A desk-based evaluation of the submitted documentation by specialists
- A visit by an international evaluator from ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites, specialist advisors to UNESCO on Cultural World Heritage nominations).

The evaluation visit took place during September 2011 and the evaluator visited the site and met key partners involved in its management. A significant amount of work was being undertaken to ensure that the two sites were presented to the best possible standard and that all partners participating in the visit were well briefed.

Following the visit, the evaluator will prepare a report which will go to the International World Heritage Committee at its annual meeting in July 2012 in St Petersburg, when a decision on the outcome of the Nomination will be made.

### **Site improvements**

The visitor experience improvements across the site, funded by Sunderland City Council, South Tyneside Council, and ONE North East, are complete and installed. These improve the displays inside and outside the two churches, include a new orientation area within the National Glass Centre encouraging visitors to visit all related attractions and include improved pedestrian waymarking, including “bread-crumbs” pavement markers from St Peter’s metro.

Sunderland City Council has allocated £1.7 million to improve the landscape setting of the site over the next 5 years. Work to detail the content of this scheme is underway in consultation with all relevant partners.

An exhibition featuring the findings of the *One Monastery in Two Places* Project, by Newcastle and Durham Universities, funded by English Heritage, will be displayed across the site in September and October. This features innovative archaeological research and work analysing the community perceptions of the site.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 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 and helps develop and bring together those communities, as highlighted through the recent Washington Heritage Festival.
- 5.2 It is vitally important that the role of the voluntary and community sector continues to be embedded in delivering the heritage agenda within the city. Sunderland already has a vast number of groups and organisations who work closely with the City Council and its partners to continue to develop, promote, support funding applications and raise awareness of the city’s important heritage agenda and it will be a continuing priority to engage with these groups in order to secure the historic environment for the future.

- 5.3 City Services is committed to ensuring that History and Heritage continue to play a key role in the future development of the city and that this continues to be delivered by working in close partnership with all sectors including community and voluntary groups, partners and stakeholders, local businesses and potential funders.

## **6.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report and to receive further updates regarding Heritage in Sunderland in the future.

## **7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 No background papers were relied upon to develop this report.

## **8.0 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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