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**SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ADULT EDUCATION -  
19<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2011**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT**

**REPORT ON THE VISITOR ECONOMY**

**Purpose of Report**

1. Consult with the Select Committee on the principals of the upcoming Visitor Economy Strategic Framework for Dudley in light of recent changes to national tourism strategy and organisational infrastructure.
2. To update the Select Committee on progress and achievements over the past 12 months in respect of the development of the borough's visitor economy and future planned developments.

**Local Growth: realising every place's potential**

3. The White paper release in October 2010 details the Coalition Governments framework for creating conditions for growth, including the role of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), the Regional Growth Fund and the changes to the planning system.
4. With the abolition of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), tourism structures across England will also be changing. Since 2001, RDAs have had the strategic responsibility for tourism, in the West Midlands through Advantage West Midlands, and they have contributed significantly to both local tourism partnerships and capital infrastructure projects.
5. The White Paper therefore starts the process of change for the tourism sector and the way in which it will deliver its activities.
6. The White Paper identifies recognises the role RDAs previously played in tourism and states that in going forward, "*emphasis will be put on leadership at a local level, particularly by local tourism businesses. Local enterprise partnerships, given their local expertise, could play a role in co-ordinating this activity and actively engaging with the private sector.*"
7. It further states that "*future delivery of tourism activities will be the responsibility of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs). DMOs should be membership and partnership bodies defined by local tourism businesses, attractions and interests*".

8. The paper continues *“As the role of the RDAs recedes, it is expected that DMOs will be formed through existing tourism support bodies, councils, local business networks and new local enterprise partnerships, on the initiative of local tourism interests. DCMS and VisitEngland will work with Government Departments and public and private sector partners to support DMOs and local enterprise partnerships in the transition from the RDA framework”*
9. Within the Black Country, Visit the Black Country has been operating for around 18 months in a shadow capacity. Visit the Black Country is considered as the Partnership Board/ DMO for the Black Country and is chaired by a private sector attraction. Visit the Black Country is currently in the process of expanding its membership and will formally link into the Black Country LEP structure.
10. Dudley MBC has been identified as the ‘Lead Authority’ for the Visitor Economy, and as such will provide support for Visit the Black Country and on tourism issues the establishment of the LEP.

### **A changing tourism landscape**

11. Nationally, the Government are developing ‘the strongest possible tourism strategy’ which is looking at:
  - What the Government does nationally
  - The role of local government and the support of the local area
  - How we stimulate the private sector in tourism
  - How we make policy in other areas that will impact the tourism industry

This will likely to support the further development of the England: Strategic Framework for Tourism 2010-2020 as well as an additional strategy the Tourism Minister has been preparing which will look at how tourism and the visitor economy works across Whitehall. This is due to be published in January 2010. An update on its contents will be given to the Committee if it has been made available.

12. England: A Strategic Framework for Tourism 2010-2020 was developed by Visit England to enable all organisations working within the visitor economy to contribute to four main objectives;
  - To increase England’s share of global visitor markets
  - To offer visitors compelling destinations of distinction
  - To champion a successful, thriving tourism industry
  - To facilitate greater engagement between the visitor and the experience.

Supporting action plans are currently being developed by a number of working groups and will detail how DMPs, LEPs and other tourism partnerships can assist in the delivery of the framework at a local level.

13. The above changes, both within the White Paper and within the Tourism Strategies provide an opportunity for Dudley and the Black Country to take stock and reassess the way in which we want to grow the visitor economy.

14. A framework for the development of the visitor economy has recently been developed by Visit the Black Country and provides a starting point for addressing visitor economy issues and opportunities for growth across the Black Country.

### **The Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)**

15. The Black Country's submission for a Local Enterprise partnership was approved on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2010.
16. A Shadow LEP Board has been established and following the detailed consultation that took place with the business community on the LEP submission over the summer, the Shadow Board provisionally identified the following key priorities for the LEP, which are critical to address in order to grow the private sector:
  - Planning
  - Transport
  - Access to Capital/Investment
  - Business Advice/Support
  - Skills Development and Education
  - International Trade
17. Communications and the image of the Black Country will be a priority running through all the six areas and will include tourism and the visitor economy. These priorities will form the basis of wider and robust engagement with businesses and business representative organisations.

### **A Strategic Framework for the Dudley Visitor Economy**

18. There are a series of documents at a local level which detail the Strategic Aims and Objectives for developing the local visitor economy. These include the Community Strategy, the Council Plan, the Cultural Strategy, the Black Country Local Enterprise plans and plans from the private sector attractions.
19. The above changes to the national tourism framework provides Dudley with an opportunity to reflect, and if necessary, reassess the strategic direction for the development of our visitor economy.
20. Therefore, with these changes in mind, a Strategic Framework for the Dudley Visitor Economy is currently being drafted. The framework will provide a single document for both the public and private sectors to work towards in achieving the aim of growing the local visitor economy.
21. Currently the Strategic Aims and Objectives contained with the documents detailed in paragraph 19 are;

### **Strategic Aims**

- Develop the Visitor Economy through enhancing the Borough's tourism potential and promoting the Borough as a high quality visitor destination
- Encourage existing day visitors to become overnight visitors

- Encourage more day visitors and for visitors to continue to return
- Provide an enhanced visitor experience
- To ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to the visitor economy within Dudley
- Work in partnership – both within Dudley and the Black Country

### **Objectives**

- Increase the contribution of creative industries and the visitor economy to the economic regeneration of the borough
- To increase the value of the visitor economy within Dudley Borough – increase by 3% per annum
- To increase the number of visitors to Castle Hill from half a million to 1 million per annum
- Increase bed occupancy within the Borough. (A baseline is currently being established and we anticipate including a growth target of 2% per annum).
- Capitalise on the Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) market
- Increase customer satisfaction ratings at the Boroughs attractions and events.

### **Growth Areas**

- Dudley Castle Hill (including Dudley Zoological Gardens, Black Country Living Museum, Dudley Canal Tunnel and Limestone Mines and Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve)
- Stourbridge Glass Quarter
- Dudley Canal network and its supporting visitor infrastructure

22. The Select committee is asked to consider the following questions;

- Do you agree with the vision?
- Have we identified the right Strategic Aims?
- Are the objectives and growth margins appropriate in the current climate?
- Do you agree with the growth areas?
- Have we missed anything?

23. The Framework document will provide significantly more detail in relation to the baselines to enable the document to monitor its effectiveness. Some of these baselines are established; however some will require some initial development work during 2011.

### **Dudley's Visitor Economy – progress report**

24. The following section of the report provides an update on the Dudley Visitor Economy, including updates of activities, events and capital developments over the past 12 months.
25. 2010 has been a strong year for the local visitor economy, despite the current economic climate. The strength of the Dudley visitor economy is that we have a strong and loyal visitor base from within the West Midlands area.
26. 2009 and 2010 saw the growth of the 'Staycation'. Visit England undertook a national survey to have a greater understanding of the staycation. In 2009, the staycationer included both residents who chose to stay in the England rather than travelling overseas (13% of those surveyed) as well as those who took an additional UK holiday (15%).
27. In 2010, these figures increased to 17% switching their holiday and 12% having an additional holiday in England.
28. Of those that holidayed in England, the general perception was that their holiday was enjoyable, fun, involving, with a great many things to do. And often, people were surprised about how much there was to do in England.
29. The increased in the staycation has meant that people have become more aware of what there is to do on their own doorstep and are actively seeking information on events and activities. Dudley therefore needs take advantage of this increased appetite.
30. Visitor figures from the Boroughs attractions are currently being gathered and will be available mid January.

### **Supporting Projects**

31. In order to develop the visitor economy, capital investment is required from both the public and the private sector.
32. The following part of the report provides an update on projects which have received capital investment in the past twelve months.

### **Ripples through Time - Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve**

33. In December 2009, the Council received its Stage 2 pass from the Heritage Lottery Fund for work to provide additional access onto and around the National Nature Reserve. Work began on site in June 2010 to create access to the Seven

Sisters Mines entrance, build two new viewing platforms, create a visitors car park and improve access on the main arterial route through the site.

34. In addition to the major engineering works, a Learning and Community Development Officer has been appointed to develop the informal and formal learning opportunities for the site. In the short time that the officer has been appointed, considerable achievements have been made in engaging with various user groups of the site. Work will continue on site until 2014.

### **Castle Hill**

35. Dudley Canal Trust has been successful in securing development funding of £118,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to work up detailed plans for an exciting and innovative new Learning and Access Hub at the Dudley Canal Tunnel and Limestone Mines site off Birmingham New Road.
36. The development funding will assist the Trust in developing plans in order for them to submitting a second stage application to HLF. It is expected that this will take up to 18 months to complete.
37. The balance of the total estimated cost of £211,000 for the planning work is to be covered by the Dudley Canal Trust, along with a feasibility grant of £10,000 from Dudley Council. Applications for funding to build and operate the Hub, expected to cost in the region of £3.5 million, will then be made to a number of potential funders including a second-round application to HLF for the full grant of £737,300.

### **Stourbridge Glass Quarter**

38. The Glass Quarter is a key visitor destination in the borough featuring attractions, glass studios and events that showcase the areas unique heritage and creative talent.
39. The Council is continuing to work with partners to promote the Glass Quarter as a visitor destination.
40. Ruskin Glass Centre officially opened the first phase of the sites redevelopment in December 2010, although the new building was open in time for the International Festival of Glass in August 2010.
41. The newly refurbished area provides workspaces for established glass artists and other creative industry businesses as well four incubation units for start up businesses. The Centre also includes a visitor café, retail area and a managed workspace area which allows artist who do not have the capital to buy their own equipment to rent out the space on a short-term basis.
42. The site has also received further funding for the second phase of the redevelopment – the restoration of the Lower Glasshouse with a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £1.85million.
43. The key elements of the HLF funded scheme include restoration of the Lower Glasshouse and plans to make it more accessible to all, while the wider project will regenerate the site, transforming it into a landmark destination with proposed visitor numbers expected to double from 13,000 to 25,000 a year by 2015, and

improved facilities and opportunities for Glasshouse College students, local glassmakers and the local economy

## **Festival and Events**

44. Festival and events provide a reason for visitors to come into Borough at particular times of the year.
45. The **International Festival of Glass** continues to be a significant event for the Borough.
46. Around 10,000 people visited the many Festival venues across the Stourbridge Glass Quarter over the August Bank Holiday weekend.
47. Visitors from all over the UK and international visitors came to the Festival to experience glass in all its forms. The glass 'taster' sessions were extremely popular, with visitors queuing at the Festival Office from 9am to get onto their chosen course.
48. British Glass Biennale opened on the 27<sup>th</sup> August to critical acclaim. Winners of all the three main prizes were announced, while the Peoples Prize was announced at the end of exhibition.
49. The Festival and Biennale has also been an opportunity to showcase the Glass Quarter and the businesses within it to overseas investors, in particular businesses from China. More recently, a trade group from Romania came to the Glass Quarter to learn how the Glass Quarter is developing itself and its businesses.
50. The **Glass Quarter Development Group** continues to work on ways in which we can promote the area as a visitor destination. This will focus in 2011 on a comprehensive marketing plan bringing the three main visitors sites marketing plans together to provide added value.
51. Dudley and Netherton town centre welcomed home a replica of the **Titanic Anchor** on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> August as part of the TV series 'We Built the Titanic' which was aired on Channel 4 from the end of September through October.
52. The event attracted in the region of 8,000 people to Netherton and Dudley to witness the procession of 20 shire horses pulling the Anchor and Dray. Although there were some technical issues with the Dray during the procession causing a delay in proceedings, the crowds stayed to welcome the Anchor to Netherton in large numbers.
53. Many local people commented on the pride that they felt about the Anchor and were glad that they had participated in the event.
54. Following the filming of the television episode, the Anchor was placed in storage and on 4<sup>th</sup> October was relocated to the front entrance of the Black Country Living Museum where it will be on display until mid/late 2011. It will then return to a permanent location in Netherton town centre.

55. A working group has been established, which includes members of the Netherton Regeneration group to undertake the necessary work to return the Anchor to Netherton.
56. The **Dudley Rock and Fossil Festival** continues to grow with the main objective of promoting the areas rich Geological Heritage. Again for 2011, Dudley is pleased that the Natural History Museum (NHM) will be attending the event with their outreach team in addition to a number of exhibits from the NHM. In addition, big name geological personalities will be attending the Festival, providing guest lectures. These relationships illustrate the high regard that the event has with the professional geological world as well as it being a fun and educational day for families and those interested in Geology.
57. The **Dudley Attractions Group** was established in early 2007 as a networking opportunity for attractions in the borough and to establish a forum in which projects could be developed. It has recently become a sub-group of the Heritage, Culture and Leisure partnership. Some of the work that they have undertaken is detailed in paragraphs 58 to 63.
58. **Heritage Open Days** is a national initiative to promote heritage sites across England. It is an opportunity to discover hidden architectural treasures and enjoy a wide range of tours, events and activities which bring to life local history and culture. In Dudley, a programme of events was developed for both Dudley and Stourbridge town centres with an additional approach to bring heritage to where people are, rather than expecting people to come to the heritage.
59. In Dudley town centre there were demonstrations of glass wheel engraving, glass beadmaking and glass blowing, a castle armoury display and mediaeval re-enactment.

The Council House hosted tours about the Council Chambers, exhibition of paintings and photographs and refreshments with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor in the Mayors Parlour.

At Stourbridge Town Hall, there was an opportunity to take a look behind the scenes of the town hall, view exhibitions and photos of Stourbridge, in particular the opening of the Ring Road, while others were taken on a guided walk around the town. Over 1800 people participated in Heritage Open Days in the Borough.

60. **Discover Dudley Fortnight** was held between June 11 – June 27 2010 and allowed attractions across the Borough to come together to offer a calendar of special event and activities over the two week period, as well as offering reduced price admission to Black Country Living Museum, Dudley Zoological Gardens and Dudley Canal Trust.
61. The fortnight of activities showcased to residents and visitors alike, what there is to see and do in Dudley – not only during the summer, but throughout the year and supports the work being undertaken by Visit England (as described in paragraphs 26 to 28 in promoting England to the ‘staycationer’).
62. The first **Discover Dudley e-newsletter** was sent out in June 2010 to coincide with the Discover Dudley fortnight. The e-newsletters provide a new avenue to promote events and activities that are taking place throughout the Borough.

Subscriber numbers have continued to rise over the past six months and feedback has been positive.

63. The group continues to work together promoting opportunities to **Group Travel organisers**. Work is continuing with group travel organisers to attract groups to the Borough. Bookings were low during 2010 because of it being a new product, however we are encouraged that those that did visit the Borough have indicated that they will return and there is a lot of interest from new operators for the 2011 calendar.

### **Supporting Business**

64. The tourism development team continues to support visitor economy related businesses. The team continues to undertake its yearly accommodation visits which enables the team to meet the accommodation providers in the borough and to undertake a basic assessment of the accommodation type and quality and provides an opportunity us to offer further support for the business.
65. This further support resulted in a training course on new marketing opportunities and in the early 2011, DMBC will be working with South Staffordshire Council and Wyre Forest Council to hold a course of website development for tourism businesses across the three local authority areas.

### **Conclusion**

66. Dudley has a strong foundation for developing its visitor economy. Over the past 12 months, significant funding programmes have supported the Boroughs aspiration in developing its visitor product and we will continue to ensure that residents and businesses within Dudley Borough benefit from these developments.

### **Finance**

67. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

### **Law**

68. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 empowers the Council to take action to implement measures it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of the Borough.

### **Equality Impact**

69. This work has been conducted in full accordance with the Council's equality and diversity policies and should in no way have any prejudicial impact on different racial groups, disabled people, both genders and /or relevant groups. The needs of children and young people are considered when undertaking any tourism activity.

## **Recommendation**

70. It is recommended that the Select Committee:-

- Supports the Draft Strategic Framework for the Dudley Visitor Economy and the vision to develop Dudley as a quality visitor destination and submits comments for the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture to consider.
- Notes the progress and achievements to date in respect of the development of the borough's visitor economy and the work of the tourism development team.



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