

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Culture and Tourism
2.	Date:	19th November 2013
3.	Title:	The future of tourism and the visitor economy in Rotherham
4.	Programme Area:	Environment and Development Services

5. Summary

This report informs the Cabinet Member of the situation with regard to the Council's current approach to tourism and how this could be taken forward as part of the work on producing a "Growth Plan" for Rotherham.

It also includes a summary of the Council's relationship with the destination marketing organisation, Welcome to Yorkshire, and the received benefits of WTY membership.

6. Recommendations

That the Cabinet Member: -

- 1) **Note the report**
- 2) **Consider how to can ensure that tourism and the visitor economy contributes to the Rotherham Growth Plan**

7. Proposals and Details

a) Current situation

- i) On 14th December 2010, the RMBC Cabinet member for Culture, Lifestyle, Sport and Tourism agreed to formally withdraw the council's tourism provision (including subscription to British Resorts and Destinations). However, it was agreed that the Council should continue its subscription to Welcome to Yorkshire, the official destination management organisation for the region.
 - ii) Benefits to RMBC of Welcome to Yorkshire membership include:-
 - Benefits of association with major national/international marketing campaigns
 - Opportunities to contribute locally-focused editorial content to the This Is Y magazine
 - Opportunity to benefit from networks, expertise, established links and credibility – e.g. Gallery Town and links to the Hepworth Gallery
 - Access to market intelligence
 - Potential to buy into regional campaigns
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WTY formerly established a South Yorkshire Tourism Advisory Group, chaired by the organisation's former Regional Director for South Yorkshire. Membership of the group included representatives of private sector hospitality/accommodation providers; tourist attractions; infrastructure organizations e.g. Robin Hood Airport and local authorities (officers). Its purpose was to engage partners; provide professional insight and advice on performance of the tourism sector, to shape and direct the development of tourism locally and to prioritise specific and significant tourism opportunities to be worked on collectively across the sub-region.

However, with the departure of the Regional Director, the group has been chaired by WTY's membership secretary and has met infrequently since June 2012.

- iii) A council wide review of marketing and communications in early 2011 resulted in Events and Promotions moving into the Chief Executive's directorate as the Marketing and Events team, managed by the Head of Corporate Communications and Marketing (HCCM). There remains no specific tourism experience or expertise within the team, although a number of services across the council contribute to the tourism agenda, e.g. the town centre Visitor Centre (now in the Economic Development team) and work to drive footfall into the town centre and elsewhere in the borough through a programme of events, including the Christmas lights switch-on; Rotherham Show and the Clifton Park bonfire.

The HCCM remains the Council's lead link officer with Welcome to Yorkshire, seeking to ensure the council capitalises on wider opportunities as they arise, including pursuing the legacy of the 2014 Tour de France in Yorkshire.

Rotherham has a number of traditional visitor attractions including Magna, Boston Castle, Clifton Park, including the Museum, and Rother Valley Country Park. There is also the proposed Visions of China development at Pithouse West. During 2007 over 8m visits were made to Rotherham attractions, although this included by residents of the borough.

- iv) However, for the purpose of promoting economic growth, a much wider tourism offer is required, including business tourism, sports and cultural events and leisure activities. According to the latest ONS statistics; tourism (which includes road, rail and air passenger transport, food and beverage serving establishment and sporting/recreational activities) supports 460 businesses (8.7% of borough total) and employs 6,800 people (6.8%)

The focus of the Council is currently on promotion of sustainable economic growth in conjunction with its partners in the Sheffield City Region (SCR). As part of this process an SCR Growth Plan is being developed, which highlights the following strengths for the Region under the quality of life theme – **“cultural amenities, natural environment and tourism offer.”**

RMBC should also benefit from the work of the SCR's Local Enterprise Partnership Tourism, Leisure and Sport sector group.

- b) The way forward.

The Rotherham Economic Plan was written in 2008 to provide the framework for delivering long term sustainable economic growth in Rotherham. Although the document is now being updated into the “Rotherham Growth Plan,” its main priorities are still the same.

With regard to tourism and the visitor economy, the Economic Plan set out the following aspirations:-

- To improve the image and perception of Rotherham, promoting the area as a place to live, work and visit.
- To widen Rotherham's business base to include more creative industries and help the creative, cultural and experience economy grow and flourish. Doing so will help attract visitors and investment and potentially assist with the retention of graduates, thereby creating a more modern and progressive image of Rotherham.
- That the council and local press work together more effectively to change and promote the image of Rotherham.
- To improve the main gateways into and out of the borough (such as the Interchange, stations and road and rail routes). Sheffield station is an example of a transformational change.
- To provide a programme of major events that will build a long-term sustainable visitor base.
- To extend a number of the annual 8m-plus day visits into overnight stays. Converting 1% of these visits would produce an additional 80,000 overnight stays each year.
- Greater investment in training and customer services for businesses and employees within the visitor economy.
- Develop niche tourism markets (including green, film and literature)

Leading to the following priorities:-

- 1) Understand and agree a brand or vision for Rotherham, focusing on what is different about Rotherham that sets it apart from our competitors.
- 2) Rotherham's future and image are inextricably linked to Sheffield and the wider city region, and as such we need to promote existing transport, business and community links.
- 3) Promote Rotherham to businesses at a regional and national level, using developments such as the AMP to attract more high-tech/high-value investment.
- 4) Encourage small, niche businesses from the retail and leisure sectors to operate from the town centre.
- 5) Work in partnership (nationally, regionally and sub-regionally) to promote Rotherham in the UK and overseas
- 6) Deliver YES! as a major national – even international – visitor attraction.

Despite the recession starting in 2008 very soon after the Economic Plan was completed, a number of the priorities/aspirations have been delivered

- The train station has undergone a major refurbishment programme
- The Council has secured money from the Portas Pilot to provide customer service training to town centre retail businesses
- Council grants to support independent businesses in the town centre; providing an alternative retail offer to Meadowhall and Parkgate.
- YES! is not going ahead, but has been replaced by Visions of China; potentially a national/international tourist attraction.
- The Yorkshire International Business Conference (YIBC) is being held at Magna in March 2014.

The Growth Plan will seek to maximise the impact that tourism has on the economy, with business tourism potential growth area, especially if a new hotel can be attracted to locate in the town centre. The Improving Places Select Commission is currently carrying out a review entitled "Supporting the Local Economy". A key part of this review will be to provide member input at the consultation stage, to the emerging growth plan for Rotherham. Although the scope for this is almost finalized now, Board members may wish to consider whether this review could also ensure that tourism and the visitor economy is incorporated effectively into the growth plan.

8. Finance

- a) Tourism is worth £7bn per year to the Yorkshire economy, of which the Rotherham share is about £225m.
- b) Following its establishment in 2009, Welcome to Yorkshire received core funding from Yorkshire Forward, as well as other income, including funding from local authorities across the Yorkshire and Humber region. The annual membership has varied between authorities. In 2011/2012, Rotherham MBC paid a subscription fee of £7,206.

However, that was the final year of YF funding and WTY has faced a significant period of challenge and change in becoming entirely self-financing through membership subscriptions and other revenue. Local authority subscriptions have been increased and for the year to March 2013, RMBC paid a subscription fee of 15,000.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

RMBC faces a number of challenges in maximizing the benefits of its Welcome to Yorkshire membership:-

- Maintaining increased membership subscription when budgets are tight.
- Limited funds to participate in relevant campaigns.
- Capitalising on the wider Yorkshire brand – this capability may be enhanced if Visions of China comes to fruition
- No dedicated officer tourism function within the council and the need to define a way forward for the marketing and promotion of the borough as a whole.+

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

A successful Rotherham tourism/leisure sector will contribute to the following corporate and EDS priorities:-

- Revitalise the town centre(s)
- Promote business start ups, growth and inward investment
- We will market Rotherham as an attractive business location by investing in initiatives to promote business growth.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

A copy of the current Rotherham Economic Plan is available on request.

Contact Name:

Simeon Leach, Economic Development Manager, Ext 23828
Email simeon.leach@rotherham.gov.uk

Tracy Holmes, Head of Corporate Communications and Marketing, Extension 22735
Email Tracy.holmes@rotherham.gov.uk
