

Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee

A meeting of Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 29th August, 2007.

Present: Cllr Hilary Aggio, Cllr Dick Cains, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley

Officers: N. Schnieder, I. Robinson (DNS), L. Southerton (SMI), P. Mennear, M. Jones (LD)

Also in attendance: A. Slater (British Waterways), J. Wilson (Teesside Princess), Mrs Fairhurst

Apologies: Cllr Jackie Earl, Cllr Mrs Kath Nelson, Cllr Mick Womphrey

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared at the meeting.

2 Minutes of Meeting Held 14th August 2007 - to follow

CONCLUDED that the minutes of the meeting held 14th August 2007 be agreed as a true record.

3 Work Programme

The Scrutiny Officer informed that he would forward a timetable for the next set of Committee meetings to members in the near future, which would include a special meeting in early October.

CONCLUDED that the Scrutiny Officer would forward a timetable of meetings.

4 Scrutiny Review of River Based Leisure Facilities:-

Members received evidence from L. Southerton, Project Director, Stockton/Middlesbrough Initiative. He indicated that an urban area of some 650,000 people would usually have one main centre. For reasons of the history and geography of the area the Tees Valley had two centres, Stockton and Middlesbrough, both of which needed to continue to be successful. The SMI sought to develop, albeit in the longer term, the land between the two centres in a way which would connect them and see them both benefit. There were 3000 hectares of land between Middlesbrough and Stockton centres, that had a relatively simple land ownership pattern.

L. Southerton noted the plans to install a sustainable Archimedes Screw to provide a pumped white water course at Tees Barrage, suitable for both novice and professional use, which would enable greater use of the course and provide development opportunities in the surrounding area. The Local Authority had been working with One North East on the proposal, and the technical work for this had been completed. The economic work was almost complete. If the proposal was successful it would be the only pumped white water course in the country, and therefore had the opportunity to build a reputation before other pumped courses that were being planned were opened. The funding costs would be in excess of £3 million, and this would be provided by several sources including British Waterways and One North East.

Other sites within the Stockton/Middlesbrough Initiative were discussed, these being: Portrack Marshes and Maze Park, the former Incinerator site/Portrack Gateway, South West Ironmasters, Billingham Beck, and the Marshalling Yards.

With regards to the Marshalling Yards, L. Southerton noted that this was a 53 hectare site with the opportunity for housing, green space, sub-regional activity, a tidal marina and Tees Valley Wildlife Trust facilities. The LA had been engaged with the rail authorities who owned the land and they had confirmed that it was no longer needed by them. However it would be 2014 before the rail authorities plan to modify their infrastructure to open up the land for development.

L. Southerton summarised that SMi was a long term plan, but with a high level of political and officer commitment. It would achieve better co-ordination of planned developments and better promotion of current activities, in order to address the need to change people's perceptions of the River Tees.

A member queried the additional income that would be generated by the Tees Barrage development, and L. Southerton predicted that this would be in the region of £200,000 - £250,000. There was a concern regarding the road link from Teesside Park to Mandale Park and the effect that this would have on the salt marsh and environmental area that was currently on this site. However officers stated that this link was not currently a priority on the plan.

The redevelopment of the Marshalling Yards was further discussed, and the need to incorporate and preserve the railway heritage in any plans was noted.

The issue of HMS Kellington was raised and officers noted that an update on the situation had been requested and will be brought to the Committee when received.

J. Wilson the owner of Teesside Princess River Cruises presented evidence on his experience of river useage. He noted that the Teesside Princess had been in operation for 12 years, and that in 2004 he became the owner of the Endeavour replica that is situated on the river, which costs £30,000 to keep on the river. He stated that his was the only full size replica of the Endeavour in the Northern Hemisphere which created both a tourism and educational opportunity. However, J. Wilson informed that on purchasing the Endeavour his business rates increased to £22,000, and the rates for the River Tees were very high when compared nationally. He was currently in dialogue with HM Revenue and Customs regarding this matter.

J. Wilson noted that he provided an alternative form of transport for public. Although the service that he provided during the day was not very profitable, he did make a profit on the evening service. Tourism signage was discussed, and J. Wilson believed that road signage for the attractions at Stockton and Thornaby could be improved. He also noted that in his experience of bringing tourists to the area there was little choice of hotels and available bed space. This led to tourist using the area as a stop-off point rather than as a base for an extended stay. J. Wilson discussed crime on the river and the absence of a police presence.

It was queried whether water taxis were a viable transport option. J. Wilson

explained that water taxis were very fuel efficient, with the Teesside Princess running on two and a half gallons of fuel per hour. He also noted that there were jet and battery powered taxis that would also be efficient. J. Wilson explained that there were 11 miles between Stockton and Yarm with Preston Farm in the middle of this stretch of river, which could be further built upon to provide an alternative transport system. He added that it was his belief the Teesdale canal system was under used in this regard.

It was further queried whether there was an opportunity for a similar boat to the Teesside Princess to operate downstream of the barrage. J. Wilson believed that there was a opportunity however there would be several safety aspects to take into consideration and the stretch of river downstream had more limited interest for the public.

N. Schneider discussed the regeneration plans for the river, reassuring that these would bring mixed use to the river not just office blocks. He stated it was important that river based businesses were incorporated into plans when regenerating other areas, so that these were developed and not lost. N. Schneider added that tourism was principally driven through regionally however on a local level the LA was working to utilise what attractions there were in the town centre to attract people down to the river, and vice versa.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.