

Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee

A meeting of Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 19th September, 2012.

Present: Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell(Chairman), Cllr Eileen Johnson(Vice Chair), Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Gillian Corr, Cllr Alan Lewis, Cllr Norma Stephenson(Sub Cllr Nigel Cooke)

Officers: Sarah Oliver, Louise McDonald(DNS), Peter Mennear, Sarah Whaley(L&D)

Also in attendance: Lisa Daley, Liz Morgan(Salthome), Wendy Sayers(Mohujo's Restaurant), Lindsay Eccles(Infinity Marine Cafe)

Apologies: Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Ray McCall, Cllr Mick Womphrey

1 Evacuation Procedure

The Evacuation procedure was noted.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes from the meetings which were held on the 2nd May and 6th June 2012.

Consideration was given to the minutes from the meetings which were held on the 2nd May and 6th June 2012 for signature.

AGREED that the minutes be signed.

4 Draft minutes from the meeting which was held on the 4th July 2012

Consideration was given to the draft minutes from the meeting which was held on the 4th July 2012 for approval.

AGREED that the minutes be approved.

5 Scrutiny Review of the Marketing of Stockton Borough - Phase 1 - The visitor economy

Members received information from representatives of businesses from the local visitor economy in relation to the Scrutiny Review of the Marketing of Stockton Borough - Phase 1.

The Committee were introduced to representatives from Saltholme(RSPB nature reserve near Port Clarence), Infinity Marine and Cafe(marine-based retailer and leisure business situated at the Castlegate Quay site, Stockton Riverside), and Mohujo's Restaurant (Mexican restaurant in Billingham).

The mains issues discussed were as follows:

Saltholme Nature Reserve

- the Committee was given a brief synopsis of the nature reserve and discussed issues surrounding the reduction in visitors since its opening 3 years ago, however the site was still attracting over 70,000 visitors.
- data collated by the RSPB indicated that out of the 40 reserves in the UK, the whole of the north had seen the biggest reduction in visitors.
- 50% of visitors lived within a 10 mile radius of the nature reserve, and 75% of visitors were repeat customers highlighting that people were happy to return.
- the cost of petrol and wider economic situation appeared to be affecting visitors coming from further afield.
- a steady decline in family groups had been recorded even though the reserve offered value for money as it was free to enter although car parking was charged for, and visitors were spending less per head than previously.
- concerns were raised in relation to poor access to the reserve if not arriving by car, and a need for improvements to cycle paths and bus services was suggested.
- advertising was wide and varied ranging from joint advertising with neighbouring reserves, RSPB website, free local publications including Council newspapers, social media sites and local radio. Joint marketing also took place with sites in the Yorkshire region. Representatives from the Washington RSPB site had visited Saltholme to understand its approach.
- there was still a need to increase local awareness of the existence of the Reserve further.
- the Reserve expressed a desire to be included in eating guides such as Stockton's 'Bite to Eat' as Saltholme had a 98 seater cafe.
- the Reserve often attracted school visits and was currently National Lottery finalists for the 'Best Education Category for Life Long Learning' award. Representatives from Saltholme enquired if any support would be available from the local authority to encourage people to vote for Saltholme, with the added benefit of increasing their profile as the winner would appear on national TV later in the year.

The Committee agreed to look into possibilities to further raise the profile of Saltholme and other attractions including investigating use of the Councils' current website, and helping promote up and coming events in Councillor ward leaflets, for example.

Mohujo's Mexican Restaurant, Billingham

- Members were given background information about the restaurant.
- impact of the recession and the challenges Mohujo's faced for continued growth, and how the Restaurant had benefitted from the small business NNDR(National None Domestic Rates) reduction scheme;

- the restaurant supported young school leavers by offering employment.
- the business had grown via word of mouth rather than heavy marketing campaigns.
- positive response received from participating in local events such as the Stockton Riverside Festival which was partly funded by the Authority, and the involvement in events had been seen as worthwhile.
- future events organised by Stockton Borough Council were also booked by Mohujo's such as the World Market Festival scheduled for September 2012, however it was suggested that businesses be included in future events at the early stages to allow a bigger input.
- the need to work in partnership with other businesses and local organisations such as Billingham Forum where pre theatre meals had been offered at discounted prices on production of a voucher from the Forums brochure.
- investigating other opportunities such as entering into online offers such as Groupon.
- holding school events by introducing school children to Mexican food by holding quizzes and tasters.

Infinity Marine and Cafe, Castlegate Quay, Stockton Riverside.

- background information was given including what the marine chandlers and coffee shop had to offer and what it could offer in the future.
- facilities at the Castlegate Quay had only been in operation for a few weeks under the new management regime, however it was felt that with the help of the authority, Stockton's Riverside would require additional promotion to realise its full potential.
- joint ticketing/packages with other businesses were discussed making a day in Stockton more attractive for visitors, such as; joint themed evenings at eating venues, creating joint packages between the various attractions, and the surrounding areas, and taking advantage of areas such as the Tees Heritage Park and Preston Park.
- new attractions such as water taxis on the Tees, potentially ferrying people from Stockton to Yarm and other locations accessible via the river. This would be assessed following a trial scheme that Infinity Marine intended to run in the near future, and would involve assessing river access points and timetabling.
- the lack of local authority funding opportunities was recognised but the importance of informal and practical support from SBC was highlighted

Members discussed with attendees the possible use for a forum in which local visitor economy businesses could network and discuss relevant issues, and this was thought to be of some benefit.

The Committee went on to discuss ways in which the authority could further

help local businesses increase awareness, footfall and combat the local economic challenges they were facing. The Regeneration Projects Manager highlighted that the Regeneration department had recently been restructured so that there was more focus on support to ensuring economic growth.

AGREED that:

1) the information be noted.

6 Work Programme

The Scrutiny Officer informed Members that the next meeting was scheduled for the 7th November 2012 and this would be the beginning of the second phase of the review which would focus on the marketing of the area.

AGREED that the information be noted.