

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

March 2009

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet Member for Arts, Leisure & Culture – Councillor Mrs Mary Womphrey

STOCKTON HERITAGE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

1. Summary

There are many local and regional strategies relating to heritage, and activities which celebrate our history, but they are not brought together in any one plan, and there are gaps. New technology has generated exciting new opportunities for us to connect and reveal aspects of our history, and to release a wealth of knowledge and information from local people.

This report outlines the current position and suggests the development of a new encompassing strategy for heritage, based around five heritage themes:

- Early Stockton, iron-age, Roman and Saxon Stockton
- Railway and engineering heritage including petrochemical industries
- Our World War I and II contribution
- Plaques, trails and interpretation in the landscape
- Recent/Living history and community interest in heritage

An overarching Heritage Strategy would exist as a written document published online, providing a framework for the work of various Council Services, community groups and heritage agencies. A new micro site within Stockton.gov.uk would allow people to add comments and pictures, driving an ever-increasing body of information on our Heritage and living history.

This would then be translated into an implementation plan.

2. Recommendations

1. To approve the development of a single overarching heritage strategy based on the 5 heritage themes.
2. To approve the formation of an officer steering group and an Independent Advisory Group to oversee the development of the Heritage Strategy and the Heritage Stockton micro-site.
3. To develop an implementation plan by summer 2009.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

To make the most of Stockton's heritage and provide a focus for local people's interest in and knowledge of our history.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

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SUMMARY

There are many local and regional strategies relating to heritage, and activities which celebrate our history, but they are not brought together in any one plan, and there are gaps. New technology has generated exciting new opportunities for us to connect and reveal aspects of our history, and to release a wealth of knowledge and information from local people.

This report outlines the current position and suggests the development of a new encompassing strategy for heritage, utilising the internet and bringing together different Council services and agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To approve the development of a single overarching heritage strategy based on the 5 heritage themes.
2. To approve the formation of an officer steering group and an Independent Advisory Group to oversee the development of the Heritage Strategy and the Heritage Stockton micro-site.
3. To develop an implementation plan by summer 2009.

DETAIL

1. Stockton Renaissance Culture Partnership defined 'Raising the profile of our heritage' as a priority objective for the period 2008 – 2012, seeking to develop our museums and heritage assets to tell the fascinating story of the borough's history and to help develop a sense of community pride. The background to this prioritisation is the general and justifiable perception that we have not made the maximum possible use of our heritage.
2. Stockton does have a rich and long history, including significant, Anglo-Saxon Roman, Viking, and Medieval settlements, a major role in the industrial revolution and nineteenth century industrial innovation, a notable part on the World War II effort, and numerous fascinating local events and accounts showing how Stockton and its people have changed the world.
3. This rich heritage has the potential to contribute significantly to all of our key themes;
 - Economic Regeneration and Transport, through tourism and our distinctive and vibrant town centres
 - Environment and Housing, enhancing the sense of place and enriching the built environment
 - Safer Communities, fostering and celebrating a sense of belonging for individuals and communities

- Children and Young People, bringing historic subjects to life through artefacts, places and stories with local connections
 - Healthier Communities and Adults, capturing and promoting living history to connect generations, encouraging exploration of the historic urban and rural landscape
4. Given this relevance to all of our key themes, it is not surprising that responsibility for heritage is spread across many departments of the Council and outside bodies. Planning Services protect our Scheduled Ancient Monuments, listed buildings, and conservation areas. Culture & Leisure Services are responsible for our museums and collections. Economic Regeneration incorporates Tourism, which seeks to promote the heritage offer to our visitors. Direct Services encompasses Parks and green-space, which includes sites of historic significance. Democratic Services support the historic civic function and provide a focus for a great deal of elected member engagement with local history. In addition, external agencies such as Tees Valley Archaeology and Tees Valley Archives are responsible for services that record, protect, and illuminate historic artefacts.
 5. Beyond the list of functions and duties outlined above, there is a huge appetite for history and heritage amongst the residents of the Borough. People are fascinated about the place they live in and its position in the sweep of social and technological progress. Individuals are tracing their ancestry and revealing connections that help them feel a sense of belonging and continuity. The online treasure chest 'Picture Stockton' is full of images and narratives contributed by the people of the area, adding texture and detail to the local story.
 6. At present it appears that the whole is less than the sum of the parts. There are aspects of our history with untapped potential.

Stockton's Heritage themes

7. There are many ways in which you could divide the subject of Stockton's heritage, most obviously chronologically, geographically or thematically. A study of the communications received and issues raised by Councillors, members of the public, and heritage agencies suggests the following as the most helpful Heritage Themes;
 1. Early Stockton, iron age, Roman and Saxon Stockton
 2. Railway and engineering heritage including petrochemical industries
 3. Our World War I and II contribution
 4. Plaques, trails and interpretation in the landscape
 5. Recent/Living history and community interest in heritage

Connecting Plans and using the world wide web

8. Some issues are encompassed in existing, robust plans, such as Conservation Management, and Museums Collections. These plans do not need to be rewritten, though we might usefully review them to see if there are gaps or opportunities for greater synergy.
9. Similarly the delivery of programmes by Tees Valley Archives and Tees Valley Archaeology could be overlaid with other related programmes, and refocused over time if necessary. We might also make more of the external funding opportunities available to these independent bodies.
10. Key stories like our railway heritage and engineering achievements demand a new plan, bringing together opportunities at sites like 48 Bridge Road, the Stockton Darlington track-bed in Preston Park, St John's Crossing, other S&D line features, Newport Bridge, Yarm viaduct, and others. The Sherraton story and that of John Walker also demand a more comprehensive approach, as does our World War 2 heritage including 'pillboxes' and the story of Thornaby Airfield.

11. 'Blue Plaques' or equivalent commemoration of individuals through the siting of interpretation or the naming of sites, has recently been given some formal structure via the adoption of a Commemoration Procedure. Though this does not cover commemoration of events.
12. Trails, in which a sequence of thematically or geographically linked points of interest are mapped and interpreted for people through some sort of leaflet or guide, have been developed by different interest groups and different services at different times. Some are relatively new, relevant and well signposted, others are tired or out of date. There may be a need for new signage and interpretation, and a review of our brown signs. In addition, it would be helpful to make it easier for people to link one trail to another, or to consider a menu of trails and sites for a given geography or topic. We might link wildlife trails with landscape heritage, geo-diversity, and bio-diversity. The internet provides an obvious opportunity for people to search and connect trails, sites and interpretive information.
13. The early history of the area, including the iron age, Roman and Saxon impact, should be revealed more effectively in a plan that encompasses the sites, the artefacts, the talks and education material, and the marketing and promotion. This is another obvious opportunity for internet based material.
14. Other web-based promotions such as the Train Trail initiative would link the Stockton story to the wider Tees Valley and regional stories, and provide a vehicle for attracting visitors to themed sites across a wider geography.
15. Additionally, there is further potential for making, and highlighting, the connections between Stockton's heritage and sub-regional contexts, initiatives and themes. The mapping of early settlement and culture across the Tees Valley is a natural start; The creativity and invention of people from the Tees Valley is an established theme celebrated in museums across the area, with potential for further development; The common industries of Iron & Steel, shipbuilding and Chemicals also provide an automatic connection and common thread throughout the sub-region. Railway history is a strong common theme, and there are current and potential joint initiatives exploring the development of railways across the Tees Valley and wider in Co. Durham. Information on the remaining World War II physical defences across the Tees Valley has already been collated and made available by Tees Archaeology. The University of Teesside and Corus are working to make the British Steel collection accessible to the public, to raise the profile of Teesside worldwide. The profile and availability of existing tours and interpretation of the built heritage across the sub-region could be made accessible through existing bodies such as Tees Valley Tourism. Joint initiatives such as the sub-regional Museums partnership, working together to share knowledge and enable access to the collections of the Tees Valley via a single portal (teesvalleymuseums.com), demonstrate what can be achieved through such joint working.
16. Working along with existing regional bodies and strategies provide a framework and further potential for making connections and partnership working. The National English Heritage and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council have regional remits; the government-backed Renaissance-in-the-Regions Museums' programme, is actively delivering and making links across the North East. Additionally One North East, the Area Tourism Partnerships, the Society of Librarians North East and the North East Regional Archives Council all have a role to play and function as potential stakeholders and enablers.

User generated content

17. Living history and local people's interest in heritage could also be captured and brought together. Software makes it possible to create a website or an area of a website which can be filled with user generated content. The hugely popular 'wikipedia' website and others like it operate on the principle that people can enter their own account of a subject and others can add to or challenge it. As a result the site shows a public dialogue, capturing more information on a subject than would be available to any one 'expert'. A new 'Heritage Stockton' site could be developed with images, maps, facts and stories added by anyone with an interest in our history.
18. This approach is also inherently democratic and accommodating of diversity. No single author or editor controls what is included and accepted as legitimate history.
19. Such a resource would add value to schools and academic research, help visitors by revealing and connecting destinations and events, and provide communities with an opportunity to write their own history.

Steering Group

20. Given the cross-departmental nature, it would be helpful to bring together an Officer Steering Group to drive the production of the plans and the development of the micro-site referred to above.

Such a group might include:

Reuben Kench, Head of Culture and Leisure

Fiona Bage, Historic Buildings Officer

Jane Hubbard, Museums Service Manager

Peter Shovlin, Urban Design Manager

Kath Winspear, Tourism Service Manager

Nigel Laws, Regeneration Projects Manager

Graham Clingan, Strategy & Development Manager - Countryside & Greenspace

Laurayne Featherstone, Libraries & Information Service Manager

David Tyrell, Tees Valley Archives Director

Robin Daniels, Tees Valley Archaeology Director

21. This group could report to the existing Urban Environment Task Group to provide a wide underpinning of member and officer input.

Independent Advisory Specialist Group

22. Given the focus on user generated content and on unlocking the expertise and interest of local individuals, it would be helpful to establish an Independent Advisory Group to oversee the production of the strategy and the website content, and to promote widespread involvement. This Independent Advisory Group should include elected members covering all parties, key academic figures and local historians, and representatives of the established local history groups or societies.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

23. There are no significant direct financial implications of this report since it is the recommendation to generate a strategy and action plan, there will be some design costs and technical costs for web site design and publication of the strategy. However, there are likely to be financial implications arising from that strategy. In addition, we must be mindful that the Independent Advisory Group, as it highlights opportunities to exploit our heritage, will be inclined to make the case for resources for trails, plaques, interpretation, leaflets, commemorative features, and even visitor facilities. The production of the Strategy is not a commitment to resource any of the opportunities set out in that strategy.

RISK ASSESSMENT

24. The production of a Heritage Strategy is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.”

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Regeneration and Transport – there is significant further potential for Heritage Tourism, and for the use of heritage to market and position Stockton Borough positively for visitors and investors.

Safer Communities – the need to provide communities with opportunities to explore and express their sense of identity will be enhanced by the production of the Heritage Strategy

Children and Young People – there are very significant educational opportunities which will be revealed or enhanced by the production of the strategy

Environment and Housing – a considerable proportion of the Strategy will be concerned with the historic landscape, revealing and helping people enjoy the natural environment, and widening our understanding of the evolution of the urban and rural landscape.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This report is not subject to an Equality Impact Assessment because the production of the Heritage Strategy is intended to ensure that all our communities benefit from and have access to heritage and historic information and facilities which are relevant and interesting to them.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

This paper, recommending the preparation of a Heritage Strategy has been the subject of consultation with members, including the Cabinet Portfolio holder for Culture & Leisure, the Council Leader, The Mayor, and members of the Urban Environment Task Group.

All Councillors and all wards are affected by the Heritage Strategy and all members will be invited to participate actively in its production.

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