

Review of the Marketing of Stockton's Visitor Offer

**Arts, Leisure and Culture
Select Committee**

Final Report

March 2013

Arts, Leisure and Culture Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1LD

Contents

| | Page |
|---|-------------|
| Select Committee Membership and Acknowledgements | 4 |
| Foreword | 5 |
| Original Brief | 6 |
| 1.0 Executive Summary | 7 |
| 2.0 Introduction | 10 |
| 3.0 Background | 11 |
| 4.0 Evidence | 13 |
| 5.0 Conclusion | 26 |

Select Committee membership

Councillor Jean O'Donnell (Chair)
Councillor Eileen Johnson (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Mark Chatburn
Councillor Carol Clark
Councillor Nigel Cooke
Councillor Gillian Corr
Councillor Alan Lewis
Councillor Ray McCall
Councillor Mick Womphrey

Acknowledgements

The Committee would like to thank:

Beccy Brown, Head of HR and Communication, Stockton Council
Reuben Kench, Head of Culture and Leisure, Stockton Council
Mark Rowell, Business Engagement Manager, Stockton Council
Sarah Oliver, Regeneration Projects Officer, Stockton Council
John Beeley, Heritage Officer, Stockton Council
Rachel Willis, Arts Development Officer, Stockton Council
Wendy Sayers, Mohujos Restaurant
Liz Morgan, Saltholme Nature Reserve, RSPB
Lisa Daley, Saltholme Nature Reserve, RSPB
Lindsay Eccles, Infinity Marine and Cafe

Contact Officer

Peter Mennear, Scrutiny Officer
Tel: 01642 528957
E-mail: peter.mennear@stockton.gov.uk

Foreword

On behalf of the Arts, Leisure and Culture Select Committee, we are pleased to present its final report on the review of the Marketing of Stockton's Visitor Offer.

It is clear that there has been significant change in the support arrangements for the visitor economy at the regional and local level. Nevertheless, the Borough continues to provide a wide ranging visitor offer, from major attractions such as Preston Park and the White Water Course to the numerous events that take place. The review has provided the opportunity to examine how growth in the local visitor economy can continue to be effectively supported by the Council and partners.

We would like to particularly thank the representatives of Saltholme, Mohujos Restaurant, and Infinity Marine and Café for discussing the issues with Members. The Committee has made recommendations that should enable the Council and local businesses to work together even more closely.

The Committee is very mindful of the fact that the area's history is a key part of its appeal. A great deal of work has already taken place to interpret and display local heritage to a range of audiences and the Committee is pleased to see the projects that are planned for the future.

We would like to thank all the officers for their support throughout the review and their help in producing this informative and positive report.



Councillor Jean O'Donnell
Chair



Councillor Eileen Johnson
Vice-Chair

Original Brief

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

The following Council Plan 2012-13 priorities are relevant:

- Promote prosperity and support economic recovery
- Improve and celebrate our heritage
- Effective marketing and communications

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

This review will be undertaken in two phases. Phase 1 will concentrate on support for the local visitor economy.

Recently there has been significant change to national, regional and sub-regional arrangements for tourism support and related marketing activity, in addition to changes associated with SBC's Regeneration Service following the EIT programme.

Within SBC, businesses within the visitor economy will in future be supported through the creation of a visitor economy specialism within the wider business engagement team.

The review will need to respond to these changes and ensure the Council is well placed to enable the local visitor economy to grow, working in partnership where appropriate.

The review will consider the marketing of the Borough in the context of these changes.

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The report presents Cabinet with the outcomes of the scrutiny review of the marketing of Stockton's visitor offer undertaken by the Arts, Leisure and Culture Select Committee during the municipal year 2012-13. The review has taken place within the context of significant change to the support arrangements for the visitor economy both locally and across the region, as a result of reduced funding across the public sector, and a number of organisational reviews.
- 1.2 Over the last decade the visitor economy has become increasingly important to the Stockton and the Tees Valley. In 2010 approximately 9000 jobs in the sub-region were directly or indirectly supported by tourism, including in both attractions and supporting services such as hotels, restaurants and day to day services.
- 1.3 The Borough contains a number of major attractions and a rich and varied events programme, ranging from Stockton International Riverside Festival (SIRF) to music and local markets; the programme is designed to not only add to the cultural life of the Borough but to increase local economic activity. There is major investment in town centres and key attractions include the re-developed Preston Park and International White Water Course, together with increased emphasis on the River Tees and the natural environment.
- 1.4 The Committee have found that there have been major changes to the regional support arrangements for the visitor economy, particularly following the abolition of One North East and Visit Tees Valley. Visit Tees Valley was previously part of Tees Valley Unlimited (TVU) which now forms the Local Economic Partnership. Its marketing priorities are focused on attracting investment from priority sectors and promoting the new enterprise zone offer. The visitor and lifestyle assets in the Tees Valley are seen as an important element of the overall Tees Valley quality of life marketing proposition when attracting potential sources of investment.
- 1.5 During the review additional funding was made available to Tees Valley Unlimited to be used on attracting inward investment. It is planned that this will include promotional work and could therefore be an extra opportunity to highlight the quality of life aspect to promoting the area. The Committee recommend to Tees Valley Unlimited that:
- 1. the additional promotional activity to attract inward investment to be undertaken by Tees Valley Unlimited should include enhancing the quality of life aspects of the marketing materials.**
- 1.6 Within the Council itself, the dedicated tourism support service that was previously provided has been reconfigured and the visitor economy is now supported locally by the Business Engagement Team, which has a focus on encouraging business growth across all business sectors. Joint work will continue with sub-regional and regional partners as opportunities arise. The Committee found that the Council's approach to supporting local visitor economy activity should be refreshed to take into account all the changes to the support arrangements and recommend that:

2. a Visitor Economy Sector Action Plan be developed to reflect the revised arrangements for supporting this business sector;

- 1.7 Public funding challenges will remain and in future the emphasis should be on enabling the visitor economy to support itself wherever possible, and ensuring that any interventions that are made secure maximum value for money. The Committee were pleased to be able to meet with local representatives of the sector during the review and noted the positive outlook and can-do attitude that exists. A number of recommendations have been made in order to support this new agenda, in order to ensure that all relevant organisations are aware of and can contribute towards Stockton's visitor offer, and the opportunities presented by joint working with Stockton Council. The Committee recommend that:

3. work to increase awareness of the opportunities for local businesses to gain benefit from the Council's events programme be undertaken;

and

4. a local Visitor Economy network be developed to provide a forum for information sharing and promote joint working.

- 1.8 Following the end of Visit Tees Valley (VTV), there has been no capacity to recreate the destination marketing role of VTV to the same extent at the sub-regional level. Stockton Council itself continues to provide a comprehensive marketing service in order to inform local residents and businesses of its activities and key messages, but also to promote the Borough to a wider audience.

- 1.9 In relation to the marketing of the Borough, Stockton's overall priorities are now to: support the TVU campaigns using a clear Stockton story, promote the Borough's year round events calendar, promote individual SBC and support non-SBC attractions, and market the heritage of the Borough.

- 1.10 A key part of any contemporary approach to marketing and publicity involves effective usage of the internet. The whole of the Council's web presence has been reviewed during the course of the Committee's review and a refreshed website, consistent with the Council's recently introduced corporate branding, will be online in the near future. This represents an opportunity to consider what the website provides in terms promoting the local visitor economy.

- 1.11 There is currently a separate site for eateries within the Borough called Bite to Eat. The need for and benefit of having such a website will be discussed with businesses through a restaurant promotions group that is currently being set up, and the Committee believe that whatever is decided some method of supporting this important part of the leisure industry should continue to be provided. The Committee recommend that:

5. methods of supporting the promotion of local restaurants and other places for eating out be explored;

and

6. the new Stockton Council website should include a dedicated section for visitors to the Borough.

1.12 A key aspect of the Borough's offer is its heritage, particularly the story of the railways. The Committee welcome all the work done to date to display and bring this to life, including at the redeveloped Preston Park and the various existing and planned public art installations, and a summary of this is included in this report. Members believe that this should always be kept under review in order to take advantage of any future opportunities. In addition, an example of a dedicated website that would showcase the whole of the Borough's heritage was demonstrated to the Committee and it would present a new and interactive way of telling Stockton's story if taken forward. The Committee recommend that:

7. the proposed development of a dedicated Stockton Borough heritage website is recognised and could be supported promotionally as existing resources allow;

and

8. the Council continues to take advantage of all appropriate opportunities to highlight the railway, industrial and scientific heritage of the Borough within promotional channels and its cultural activity and events programme.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 The report presents Cabinet with the outcomes of the of the scrutiny review of the marketing of Stockton's visitor offer undertaken by the Arts, Leisure and Culture Select Committee during the municipal year 2012-13.
- 2.2 The review has taken place within the context of significant change to the support arrangements for the visitor economy both locally and across the region, as a result of reduced funding across the public sector, and a number of organisational reviews.
- 2.3 The review has examined the issues in light of these changes in order to take stock and make suggestions on the way forward.
- 2.4 The Committee was grateful to be able to discuss the issues with representatives of organisations and businesses involved in the local visitor economy; these were Saltholme Nature Reserve near Port Clarence, Mohujos Restaurant in Billingham, and Infinity Marine and Café on Stockton Riverside.

3.0 Background

3.1 The visitor economy can be wide ranging in terms of the type of business included within it. Primarily the visitor economy would fall in to two categories; attractions including the natural environment, culture, retail, sport, leisure facilities, festivals, and services including hotels, pubs and restaurants, and day-to-day services.

3.2 The Tees Valley visitor economy, in common with other areas of the North East, experienced a period of growth from 2003 – 2009. The number of overnight visitors travelling to Tees Valley rose by 26% and visitor expenditure rose by more than £40 million over this time period. The most recent information available is drawn from the research undertaken on behalf of One North East in 2010 by Global Tourism Solutions, using the Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Model (STEAM). Key headlines from the report were:

- 2.1 million overnight tourists spending 4.6 million nights in the area;
- 13 million day visits;
- Total economic value of £563m (overnight visitors £233m, day visitors £330m);
- 7,200 direct tourism jobs (full time equivalents);
- 1800 jobs supported by indirect revenue from tourism;
- Two thirds of overnight visitors to Tees Valley stay with friends and relatives.

3.3 The report looked at the volume and value of visitors to Tees Valley in 2009. This data is not now produced for Stockton Borough and there would be a significant cost to obtain it in the future.

3.4 A 2008 research survey carried out by One North East showed that the main visitors to the area were between 18 – 24 years old (45.5%) and that of those staying for one to three nights 40.3% were 25 – 34 years old and 25.7% were 45 - 54 years old and these mainly arrived from Yorkshire and Humberside. The top four reasons for visiting were Exploring Towns & Cities 44.6%, Exploring the Countryside 41.6%, Events 32.2% and Shopping 30.9%.

3.5 Overall visitor numbers to attractions in Tees Valley in 2010 grew by 6% in comparison to 2009. Two attractions in Stockton were listed amongst the top ten most visited attractions in 2010 in the Tees Valley:

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| Preston Hall and Museum* | 89,054 visitors |
| Saltholme | 80,316 visitors |
| *closed during Nov/Dec 2010. Source: One North East: North East Visits to Attractions Report 2010 | |

3.6 Events and specialist markets are widely recognised as being an integral part of the Borough’s visitor economy. Visitor figures and analysis for SIRF 2012 show that:

- 95.7% of visitors thought that SIRF is a good thing for Stockton Borough;

- 84% of visitors thought SIRF is good for promoting Stockton as a place to visit;
- 89% of visitors thought that supporting SIRF is a good use of Stockton Borough Council's resources;
- 22% of visitors had attended SIRF 20 times or more;
- Estimated income of £1.3m was generated within the Borough as a result of the festival (this excludes additional spend arising from later visits that are a consequence of the profile of SIRF). Average level of spend was £18.16;
- 1,607 participants and 68 groups participated in the Community Carnival;
- 21 groups were new to the carnival;
- SIRF presented more than 110 performances and exhibitions to estimated audiences of over 70,000 people.

3.7 Sports events are also increasingly important to the local economy. The Triathlon and River Rat Race are two of the most high profile events on the River Tees with participation figures increasing over the last 2 years.

| Event | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| River Rat Race | 760 | 981 | 1200 |
| Triathlon | 400 | 560 | Did not take place |

3.8 In 2013 the Triathlon will be replaced by the area's first Duathlon. The Stockton Cycling Festival continues to develop and 4000 people took part in the 2012 event, which included both elite events and mass participation opportunities.

3.9 During the course of the review Preston Hall re-opened following its re-development and is projected to be a major attraction in the Tees Valley. Since re-opening there have been 94,000 visits as of January 2013. Data is being collected on where visitors are originating from and will be available in due course.

4.0 Evidence

- 4.1 It was clear from the start of the review that there had been significant change to the support arrangements for the visitor economy at a national, regional, and local level, and the funding available.
- 4.2 At a national level there remains a key focus on the value of tourism to the economy, and recognition of the marketing opportunities following significant events including the Royal Wedding, Diamond Jubilee, and London 2012. Visit Britain is responsible for marketing Britain worldwide and has a new strategy aiming to attract 40m visitors a year by 2020, compared to the 31m that currently visit. The aim is to build on Britain's strengths such as heritage and the exposure gained through the London 2012 Games, and address weaknesses in perceptions relating to 'natural beauty, food, value, and welcome'.
- 4.3 VisitBritain works with its national partners including Visit England. VisitEngland's role as the tourist board is to grow the value of tourism by working in partnership with the industry to deliver marketing campaigns and to provide advocacy for the industry and visitors. National Government policy demonstrated through VisitEngland's funding and marketing activity is designed to embrace such a public/private partnership approach.
- 4.4 VisitEngland oversees the national tourism strategy – England: A strategic Framework for Tourism 2010-2020. The strategy sets out an 'attract and disperse' approach to marketing England as a destination to domestic and established overseas markets. They will work with tourism partners and the private sector at a national and local level based but this is based on key criteria for destination management organisations. The focus is on those already established and widely recognised major tourist destinations.
- 4.5 In 2011, VisitEngland secured Regional Growth Funding for a 3-Year tourism project, 'Growing Tourism Locally' aimed at stimulating economic growth and jobs at a local level. The funding is allocated to a number of destination management organisations (for example, Visit York, and the Newcastle Gateshead Initiative) in England that will work closely with VisitEngland to design and implement local campaigns. Stockton and the Tees Valley will need to take advantage of opportunities to work with the major tourist locations as they arise.
- 4.6 The Committee found that at a regional and sub-regional level, there has been substantial change to the support and funding provided. Formal regional structures to support the visitor economy ceased following the closure of One North East (ONE) in March 2012. ONE marketing activity ended in May 2010 as part of the reductions to public sector spending. This work included North East marketing campaigns (for example, the 'Passionate People, Passionate Places' campaign), the North East Visitor Guide, marketing analysis, and visitor attractions footfall data.
- 4.7 Former One North East promotional assets, such as branding and marketing collateral, have been protected through various acquisition and transfer arrangements. They remain available for Tees Valley use if desired.
- 4.8 There have been attempts to ensure that a regional dimension to tourism promotion continues. The Northern Tourism Alliance, formed in 2011, is

currently an informal partnership between Visit County Durham, Newcastle Gateshead Initiative, Northumberland Tourism, Hadrian's Wall Heritage and the North East Hotels Association. It is emerging as the possible public sector successor in relation to the promotion of tourism across the region, and an officer from Tees Valley Unlimited (TVU) or one of the Councils has represented the Tees Valley at meetings so far.

- 4.9 Across the North East and Yorkshire all tourism and destination management organisations have undergone some form of review due to funding cuts. The majority have reduced the scale and scope of operations and are moving towards more private sector-led funding and governance arrangements.
- 4.10 Visit Tees Valley (VTV) was the local Area Tourism Partnership and Destination Management Organisation. VTV was responsible for the strategic direction of tourism in Tees Valley. Its priorities were based around improving the physical product, developing Tees Valley as an events destination, upskilling the tourism workforce, and undertaking marketing to improve the perceptions of the area.
- 4.11 In 2010/11 VTV had a budget of £810k of which £213k was for marketing. TVU received direct funding from ONE of £600k towards the operational costs of VTV and all of that funding was withdrawn. An example of the work done to develop the workforce was the 'My Tees Valley / My Stockton' training courses, which were designed to increase awareness of the area's heritage and other attractions amongst local tourism industry staff.
- 4.12 Visit Tees Valley was part of TVU which itself has been subject to a full review which was completed in March 2011. The review resulted in the organisation being reduced to approximately one third of its previous size. TVU is now more focussed on strategic leadership of the sub-region, and is focussed on delivering its two main aims as contained in its statement of ambition:
1. Drive the transition to a high value, low carbon economy.
 2. Create a more diversified and inclusive economy.
- 4.13 The Committee found that most marketing and business support activities for the visitor economy ceased when VTV was wound up in March 2011 following the loss of the funding from ONE. At the time it was recognised that following the end of sub-regional activity and the reduction in direct support provided to the sector, it would be necessary for local tourism businesses to operate their own networks and play an increasing role in their marketing. TVU hosted a temporary tourism post which focussed on exit strategies, and this post ended in March 2012.
- 4.14 TVU's marketing priorities are focused on attracting investment from priority sectors and promoting the new enterprise zone offer. The visitor and lifestyle assets in the Tees Valley are seen as an important element of the overall Tees Valley quality of life marketing proposition when attracting potential sources of investment. The new TVU website and marketing information are continuing to be developed and will highlight quality of life aspects such as attractions, leisure, education and health provision in the area.
- 4.15 During 2008-11, the North East's local authorities worked together through the Regional Efficiency and Improvement Partnership which utilised government funding to deliver a number of projects. Following the scheduled end of the RIEP project some legacy funding has been made available to Tees Valley

Unlimited to be used on attracting inward investment. The funding amounts to £50k per year for three years. It is planned that this will include promotional work and could therefore be an extra opportunity to highlight the quality of life aspects outlined above when promoting the area. The Committee recommend to Tees Valley Unlimited that:

1. the additional promotional activity to attract inward investment to be undertaken by Tees Valley Unlimited should include enhancing the quality of life aspects of the marketing materials.

4.16 SBC's tourism service has been the subject of two Efficiency, Improvement & Transformation (EIT) reviews. As a result of the review of Events, Arts and Tourism the vacant Tourism Promotions Assistant post was deleted from the structure. This was followed by the review of the whole Regeneration & Economic Development service which considered the role of the Council in relation to tourism. In light of the need to reduce expenditure and reprioritise support, it concluded that the Regeneration Service's role within tourism should be focussed on encouraging business growth and enabling the sector to support itself. This role was to be undertaken as part of the work of the wider business engagement role of the service. As part of that process the Tourism Promotions Manager post was deleted from the structure and a visitor economy specialism role was developed as part of one post within the business engagement team. The focus of the work is therefore now on providing support to visitor economy businesses to assist with their growth plans, ensure they are aware of and have access to the support available, and that they are able to benefit from the visitor attraction opportunities in the Borough.

4.17 The Tourist Information Centre (TIC) was in the Shambles but has recently moved to 134b High Street and has re-opened as the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) within the Rediscover Stockton Shop. It is the frontline customer facing part of the service and is run by 2.5 FTE staff. Stockton was the highest ranked for customer service in the Tees Valley following a recent VisitEngland Mystery Shopper survey. Following the recommendations of both the EIT reviews, further consideration is to be given to visitor information functions being made available in the Customer Contact Centres and other appropriate premises.

4.18 It will be important to continue to work with partner authorities in the Tees Valley –area, together with other organisations further afield when it makes sense to do so. The Committee found that the Council's approach to supporting local visitor economy activity should be refreshed to take into account the changes at a regional and local level, and recommend that:

2. a Visitor Economy Sector Action Plan be developed to reflect the revised arrangements for supporting this business sector;

4.19 Stockton Borough contains a number of attractions that attract people from in and out of the Borough. In addition to the summary of festivals and events outlined in the Background section, direct support is provided by the Council through a range of mechanisms including its £20m investment in improvements in Stockton Town Centre, the £7m investment in Preston Hall & Park, and the further expansion of the programme of specialist markets.

4.20 The range of local attractions is completed by the numerous private and voluntary organisations in the area that provide a variety of services and contribute to the visitor economy. The Committee met with representatives from

the following organisations in the Borough in order to get a sample of views: Saltholme Nature Reserve, Mohujos Restaurant, and Infinity Marine and Café.

- 4.21 Saltholme Nature Reserve is managed by the RSPB and has been open since 2009. Saltholme is established as a major attraction in the area and welcomes over 70,000 visits per year. Half of visitors live within ten miles, and three-quarters are repeat visitors. There has been a small decline in visitor numbers since the opening year, although this is in common with any attraction following the initial interest generated by its opening, and has been in line with other RSPB reserves in the north.
- 4.22 It was stated that the economy appeared to be having some effect on visitor numbers as although the attraction is free to enter, there is a chargeable car park and most people arrive by car due to its location: therefore any improvements to public transport would be welcomed.
- 4.23 Marketing undertaken by the Reserve included joint advertising with neighbouring reserves, a dedicated space within the RSPB website, adverts in free local publications including Council newspapers, use of social media, and ensuring there is coverage on 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. However, it was identified that further work may be necessary to increase awareness within the Borough and encourage more local people to visit. The Reserve has a 98 seater café, and would welcome being part of any promotional materials for restaurants and cafes as Saltholme had a 98 seater café.
- 4.24 The Committee was pleased to note that the Reserve often attracted school visits and during the course of the review the project had entered and won the National Lottery's 'Best Education Category for Life Long Learning' award, receiving almost 10,000 votes from the public. This had led to Saltholme receiving national publicity exposure.
- 4.25 Mohujos is a Mexican-themed restaurant in Billingham and Members were provided with an overview of the business, including the impact of the recession and the challenges Mohujos faced for continued growth. It was described how the restaurant had benefitted from the small business National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) reduction scheme.
- 4.26 The business has grown via word of mouth rather than heavy marketing campaigns, however there was growing usage of the web and Facebook, and a desire to work in partnership with other businesses and local organisations such as Billingham Forum and, for example, pre-theatre meals had been offered at discounted prices on production of a voucher from the Forums brochure.
- 4.27 The Committee noted that Mohujos had taken advantage of being involved in the Council's events programme. They had received a positive response from being involved in SIRF which had been supported through the Council and Town Team project. This was followed by participation in the World Market Festival in September 2012. An area for future improvement could be including businesses in the planning of events at an earlier stage in order for them to make the most of the opportunities.
- 4.28 Infinity Marine and Café outlined progress on their new café and marine chandlers venture at Castlegate Quay on Stockton Riverside. The Committee were pleased to note that the building previously used by Tees Active for its

watersports base was being put to good use following consolidation of Tees Active's activities at the International White Water Centre site.

- 4.29 The Committee were provided with information on the development of the business and future plans for new attractions for the area, such as water taxis on the Tees. This could potentially transport 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, timetabling, and compatibility with river navigation regulations. If taken forward this would fulfil a long term aspiration of the Committee and Council following the Committee's review of River Based Leisure Facilities in 2008.
- 4.30 During discussion with the organisations in attendance it was recognised that public funds were extremely limited, and that in terms of support available, the provision of advice and practical help from the Council and agencies were just as important.
- 4.31 Evidence from all three organisations suggested that there was further scope for increased networking opportunities, and the development of web presence. Joint ticketing/packages with other businesses were discussed in order to make 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 better advantage of natural attractions such as the Tees Heritage Park, and Preston Park.
- 4.32 The Committee found that there was much positive activity being undertaken locally, but that, especially in the context of the cessation of other support organisations such as VTV, there was a need to increase the ability of the sector to network and support itself. Advice and guidance will be available from the SBC Business Engagement Team but this work must be taken forward in the context of the sector working together to support its aims.
- 4.33 The Committee recommend that:
- 2. work to increase awareness of the opportunities for local businesses to gain benefit from the Council's events programme be undertaken;**
- and
- 3. a local Visitor Economy network be developed to provide a forum for information sharing and promote joint working.**
- 4.34 Following the end of Visit Tees Valley (VTV), there has been no capacity to recreate the destination marketing role of VTV to the same extent at the sub-regional level. Stockton Council itself continues to provide a comprehensive marketing service in order to inform local residents and businesses of its activities and key messages, but also to promote the Borough to a wider audience. A similar approach has been adopted across all Tees Valley authorities, although joint working remains in place co-ordinated through the TVU Communications Group.
- 4.35 In relation to the marketing of the Borough, Stockton's overall priorities are now to: support the TVU campaigns using a clear Stockton story, promote the

Borough's year round events calendar, promote individual SBC and support non-SBC attractions, and market the heritage of the Borough.

- 4.36 There is an annual marketing campaign programme, and available resources are focussed on each year's chosen topics. The 11 key messages for 2012-13 have covered a range of issues (for example welfare reform and school building), but particularly relevant for the review have been the following: 'Re-opening of Preston Park', and the 'Exciting year-round programme of events'.
- 4.37 Events have been adopted as a strategic priority to increase economic activity and as a cost effective method of changing perceptions of the area. The SBC-led events programme includes SIRF, Stockton Sparkles, Infinity Festival, Fireworks, and sporting events including the Rat Race, and the cycling festival. New types of event continue to come forward including for example the Duathlon and the Diwali-inspired Festival of Lights. Music-based events continue to develop, for example Stockton Calling which is organised by the ARC, Tees Music Alliance, and Kubar, and this, together with long standing events such as Billingham International Folklore Festival, demonstrates the contribution made by partners and reflects the full range of events taking place.
- 4.38 Individual SBC-led attractions and events have specific marketing approaches where appropriate, and these include the revamped branding of Preston Park Museum and Grounds, and themed leaflets and web presence for Stockton Sparkles and the Stockton Fireworks. Promotional work for SIRF now takes place in regional towns and cities including Newcastle, Harrogate and York. The hosting of high profile events can showcase attractions to a wider audience; for example, Preston Park has hosted the Northern Children's Book Festival which has attracted visitors from across the region.
- 4.39 Stockton Town Centre Regeneration is being promoted under the 'Rediscover Stockton', and also has a high street presence combined with the TIC in the 'Rediscover Stockton' shop, and dedicated website. This is also one of the 11 key campaigns for 2012-13.
- 4.40 Within the Borough, residents receive the Stockton News publication and this has been refreshed with a new design that fits in with the new approach to marketing, and includes promotion of relevant attractions and events.
- 4.41 Local non-SBC managed attractions and events (including for example, the White Water Course, ARC, Georgian Theatre, Saltholme, Teesside Princess) are supported with a range of cross promotional activity which sees their details included on appropriate marketing information for no charge. The Council has a contract for the distribution of the leaflets it produces itself.
- 4.42 A key part of any contemporary approach to marketing and publicity involves effective usage of the internet. Following on from the closure of Visit Tees Valley, the associated website ended in March 2012. The data behind the website was also linked to the Visit Stockton website via a system called Desti.ne which was also no longer funded as of March 2012. As a result of this the former standalone website for Visit Stockton was redirected to the Leisure and Visiting page within the Council's website (www.stockton.gov.uk/citizenservices/leisureandents). This option carries no cost associated with it and houses links to external sites e.g. accommodation and visitor attractions and also a link to the Stockton Visitor Guide. Stockton Council has full control over the site and pages can be reviewed and updated as frequently as required. However the whole of the Council's web presence has

been reviewed during the course of the Committee's review and a refreshed website, consistent with the Council's recently introduced corporate branding, will be online in the near future. This represents an opportunity to consider what the website provides in terms promoting the local visitor economy.

4.43 In order to promote the restaurant trade, there is currently a separate site for eateries within the Borough called Bite to Eat (www.bitetoeat.co.uk). This site is controlled and maintained by an external agency and the Council incurs costs every time updates or changes need to be made. It is not possible to easily measure if this site having any effect on the number of visitors to the restaurants. The need for and benefit of having such a website will be discussed with businesses through a restaurant promotions group that is currently being set up, and the Committee believe that whatever is decided some method of supporting this important part of the leisure industry should continue to be provided.

4.45 The Committee recommend that:

5. methods of supporting the promotion of local restaurants and other places for eating out be explored;

and

6. the new Stockton Council website should include a dedicated section for visitors to the Borough.

4.46 The Committee has been particularly interested the promotion of the Borough's heritage. This is not only important for community pride and involvement, but as the Heritage Strategy 2011 acknowledges, can play an important role in increasing the attractiveness of the Borough as a place to visit.

4.47 The Strategy outlines that 'promoting our heritage is not only about helping local people take pride in Stockton's story but is also about increasing awareness amongst our visitors. Stockton's heritage is enjoyed by its many visitors to the region, which tend to be business tourists, people visiting friends and family and day visitors. There are huge opportunities for these groups to enjoy Stockton's heritage offer and encourage longer stays and repeat visits. Ensuring these visitors get access to the best information and know where to visit will ensure that Stockton's heritage is promoted on a wider geographical basis.'

4.48 The following Strategy aims are particularly relevant to the review:

- 2) to provide the greatest possible access to our heritage for all of our communities and visitors to the Borough;
- 3) to market our heritage as part of a wider strategy in re-shaping the perception and image of the Borough;
- 4) to continue to conserve the historic and natural environment with the support of local groups, societies and volunteers through our on-going regeneration, environment and research programmes.

4.49 The delivery actions associated with number 3 include:

- Develop the visitor experience through heritage events and festivals.
- Promote cultural / historic and natural heritage tourism.
- Increase length of stay of visitors promoting the wealth of heritage and places to visit / see.

- Use the promotion of heritage assets as a key driver for changing perceptions and creating a new image brand.
 - Develop a recognisable heritage identity and presentation style of heritage information.
 - Ensure good distribution of heritage material (e.g. trails and leaflets) to Tourist Information Centres and other key visitor outlets.
- 4.50 The re-development of Preston Park Museum and Grounds is a key example of the work that has been undertaken that are in line with these ambitions. The £7m re-development has seen a complete redisplay of the wide and varied collection, new learning facilities, a refreshed Victorian Street and the development of a traditional walled kitchen garden and orchard. The grounds also include a new play area and landscaping.
- 4.51 On a smaller scale, the interpretation of local heritage has been developed through projects such as the adoption of a local Heritage Plaque scheme, and a plaque is expected to be installed on the former home of Dr McGonigle in the coming months. The web-based Stockton Commemorative Hall of Fame contains the names of noteworthy individuals from, or linked with, the Borough (for example, Brass Crosby and Harold Macmillan).
- 4.52 The Committee has been particularly keen to see further promotion of the part played by the Borough in the birth of the railways in the nineteenth century. The Stockton to Darlington Railway opened in September 1825 and transported not only goods, but also passengers. This was a world first and marks the Borough's most significant contribution to the Industrial Revolution and the making of modern Britain. The first journey on the line was made by George Stephenson's new 'Locomotion No.1', and the experiences on the line influenced his work on the development of the Liverpool to Manchester Railway which did not open until several years later.
- 4.53 During the course of the review, a submission was also received from local resident John Fletcher outlining a number of suggestions as to how to make best use of the Borough's industrial heritage, including the railways, when marketing the area. This included the importance of ensuring that the physical remains of the original Stockton-Darlington Railway are preserved.
- 4.54 Suggestions are made to encourage those visiting the area with family stay longer, combine railway heritage with promotion of the wider engineering history of the Borough, and join up the promotion of the railways in Stockton with local existing attractions, including Darlington. It also suggests ensuring that front line staff (for example, taxi drivers, hotel staff, restaurant staff) are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their local area due to the positive impression this gives.
- 4.55 It was recognised in both the public submission, and during discussion at Committee, that the opportunities to undertake additional large scale visitor attractions based on the Borough's railway history in particular are limited given the few remaining physical remains, and the presence of established railway-focussed visitor attractions in the region at York, Darlington and Shildon.
- 4.56 The need to promote the railway history of the area has been a priority for several years. In 2006, the previous Adults, Leisure and Culture Committee undertook a comprehensive review of the role of Preston Hall and Park. The findings and recommendations of the review included the need to focus the

collections of Preston Hall Museum on key themes of the Borough's history, including the railways, and to explore further how this history can be reflected and represented in the Park.

- 4.57 A number of projects have taken place and more are in the pipeline. The re-development has ensured Preston Park Museum and Grounds' position as a major visitor and heritage attraction, and the Stockton & Darlington Railway is a major theme in the museum displays. These include cases illustrating the Railway narrative, its importance to Stockton and the impact on the wider world. These are complemented by three interactive displays including audio-visual displays and a quiz, using the theme of Locomotion No1.



Display cases at Preston Hall Museum

- 4.58 Outside the Museum railway heritage is further displayed through a collection of stone sleeper blocks from the 1825 Railway and the 'coffee pot' steam locomotive engine built by Head Wrightson. The Teesside Small Gauge Railway continues to operate within the Grounds and operates for the public on Sundays during the Summer, providing an additional source of interest.

- 4.59 Some of the remains of the original 1825 track bed are located in Eaglescliffe, including within the boundary of Preston Park Grounds. In order to improve the interpretation of the remaining line a bid has been prepared for submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund, named the 'Back on Track' project. The bid will include proposals to:

- deliver a volunteer based archaeology project to examine undocumented features of the track bed;
- introduce woodland management to conserve the visible track bed in the Park;
- improve physical access to the remains for visitors;
- develop onsite interpretation of the line within the boundary of the Grounds including panels, directions signs, digital interpretation and learning packs;
- develop a three-year event and community involvement programme to build on and increase local awareness of the line, possibly including walks and tours.

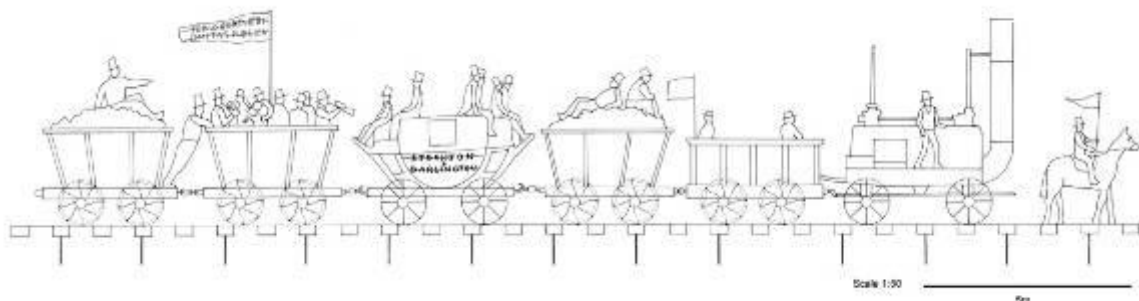
- 4.60 Outside of Preston Park there are a number of existing and planned public art installations that celebrate the Railway heritage. A mural depicting Locomotion No 1 is located in Bishop Street car park - the car park is within metres of the

original terminus of the Railway. Painted in 2005 by local artist Zac Newton the mural is a popular feature and has recently been refurbished. The mural also references the invention of the friction match and features a quote from George Stephenson, 'What we do today will change the world'.



Mural at Bishop St Car Park

- 4.61 Interpretation around the Borough includes commemorative plaques on Bridge House and Yarm Town Hall, and a number of street names in the Borough have been named after significant people and events, including those related to the railway.
- 4.62 Future interpretation work includes the planned 1825 railway themed artwork as part of the Southern Gateway junction improvements near Stockton High Street. This is where the first rail of the Stockton and Darlington Railway was laid on 13th May 1822 near St John's Crossing, on Bridge Road. The new junction will be named St John's Crossing and to celebrate the heritage of the site an artwork has been developed to depict the inaugural journey. The artwork has been designed by Steve Tomlinson and will be located behind Matalan/Halfords. The sculpture has planning permission and will be installed to coincide with the completion of the works in August 2013.



Design of the St John's Crossing artwork



Projected view of installed artwork from Bridge Road side

- 4.63 On the opposite side to the main installation there will be an interpretation panel, next to some smaller artwork, and this will provide historical context. This will be sited on the Bridge Road side, near to the historic Bridge House which was used in the operation of the Railway.



Artist's impression of the interpretation panel near St John's Crossing

- 4.64 As part of the regeneration scheme on Stockton High Street Centre it is planned to install a large scale moving-artwork inspired by the heritage of the Borough. This is still at the design stage however it is planned that at a set time each day an automated sculpture will emerge from a plinth, reaching its full size with automated movements before disappearing back into the plinth. The aim is for this daily event to become a real feature of the new High Street and talking point for both local people and visitors.

- 4.65 Models of three potential designs were displayed in the Rediscover Stockton Shop for a public vote and the winning design by artists Rob Higgs and Keith Newstead is of a locomotion rising up from a stone plinth base, entitled 'The Stockton Flyer'. The artists are now developing their concept design with instructions to ensure it takes Locomotion No 1 as its inspiration rather than the Rocket or any other Stephenson design.



Artist's impression of the Stockton Flyer automaton

- 4.66 When not in use by the automaton the 'empty' plinth will be a focal point for the High Street and could act as a podium for people to speak from/perform upon and as a plinth for temporary artworks. Longer term projects include the potential to develop a scale model of the Locomotion for the Preston Park Narrow Gauge Railway, and consideration is already being given to how the Borough will celebrate the 200 year anniversary of the Stockton to Darlington Railway in 2025.
- 4.67 It should be recognised that the railway story is only one part of the Borough's industrial heritage, and as a whole this encompasses shipbuilding, engineering and the chemical industries. During the 2013 Festival of the North, Stockton will host 'Riveting Stuff' which will be an element of the overall Festival dedicated to telling the area's contribution to the industrial revolution and the continuing importance of its key sectors.

4.68 As part of the review a website dedicated to describing the heritage and history of the Borough has been in the early stages of development and it was showcased to the Committee. It has been produced by an external organisation and is an option for the Council to pursue. The website would be searchable by theme/event/person, and may include the potential for user generated content. The Committee believe such a website would complement the existing provision and potentially bring the story of the Borough's heritage to a new audience both within and outside the Borough.

4.69 The Committee have therefore found that a number of projects are planned in order to build on the interpretation of the Borough's heritage that already exists. The Committee supports these and believes that opportunities to do more should always be kept under review. The Committee recommend that:

- 7. the proposed development of a dedicated Stockton Borough heritage website is recognised and could be supported promotionally as existing resources allow;**

and

- 8. the Council continues to take advantage of all appropriate opportunities to highlight the railway, industrial and scientific heritage of the Borough within promotional channels and its cultural activity and events programme.**

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The visitor economy is important for both Stockton Borough and the wider Tees Valley. As of 2010, approximately 9000 jobs were directly or indirectly supported through tourism in the sub-region. Effective marketing has benefits both in terms of increasing the numbers of all types of visitor, and improving perceptions of the area which can in turn lead to inward investment.
- 5.2 The Committee have found that there have been major changes to the regional support arrangements for the visitor economy, particularly following the abolition of One North East and Visit Tees Valley. Within the Council itself, the dedicated tourism support service that was previously provided has been reconfigured and the visitor economy is now supported locally by the Business Engagement Team, which has a focus on encouraging business growth across all business sectors.
- 5.3 Public funding challenges will remain and in future the emphasis should be on enabling the sector to support itself wherever possible, and ensuring that any interventions that are made secure maximum value for money. The Committee were pleased to be able to meet with local representatives of the visitor economy during the review and noted the positive outlook and can-do attitude that exists. A number of recommendations have been made in order to support this new agenda.
- 5.4 Within the Borough, there is major investment in town centres and key attractions, and Stockton continues to provide a wide visitor offer. Modern attractions include the International White Water Course and there is increased emphasis on the River Tees and the natural environment, however a key aspect of the Borough's offer is its heritage, particularly the story of the railways. The Committee welcome all the work to interpret local history, including the redevelopment of Preston Park. Members believe that the Council should continue to take advantage of any future opportunities to showcase its heritage.