

EXECUTIVE MEMBER ANNUAL REPORT – 2008/09

COUNCILLOR SHIRLEY BURNS, CABINET MEMBER WITH SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR TOURISM AND EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE DISTRICT



1 INTRODUCTION

I have enjoyed my year on the Cabinet and I would like to thank all the staff who have gone out of their way to give me all the help and support possible in these difficult financial times.

2 EXECUTIVE MEMBERSHIP:

- Cabinet
- Festivals and Events Cabinet Liaison Group (Chairman)
- Morecambe Retail, Commercial and Tourism Cabinet Liaison Group

3 EXECUTIVE APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES etc:

- British Resorts Association
- Lancaster District Sustainability Partnership
- LGA Tourism Forum
- LSP Children and Young People Thematic Group
- LSP Valuing People Thematic Group

4 OVERVIEW OF PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITIES

Tourism and Events throughout the District

CORPORATE PLAN PRIORITY OUTCOMES:

Improve the district's competitiveness as a visitor destination:

- *Implement the Council's Tourism Strategy*
- *Attract visitors to the district by promotion of cultural events*

From 4th February 2009 the following was added to Councillor Burns' portfolio:-

- *Deliver a Civic Programme which celebrates our local heritage and benefits our communities and civic pride. Including pending Centenary celebrations (100 years Town Hall and Ashton Memorial).*

5 PROGRESS MADE DURING 2008/9

Tourism

Tourism Strategy Update

In December 2008, Cabinet was presented with an update of the district-wide Tourism Strategy. The document included a review of the very significant progress that has been made over the two year period since the strategy was first produced, and it is worth highlighting some of these achievements here:

- Restoration work on the Midland Hotel in the centre of Morecambe, costing about £11 million, has been completed and the Midland re-opened at the beginning of June 2008. The refurbished hotel is already attracting more high spending visitors to the district and, together with plans for further redevelopment of the adjacent central promenade area, can act as a catalyst for the further regeneration of Morecambe as a significant visitor destination. The restoration and reopening of the hotel has attracted high levels of national media attention for Morecambe.
- Following the opening of the Midland Hotel, a new brochure aimed at the niche market likely to be attracted by the four and five star market has been produced. It covers the whole of the district plus some destinations just outside. This brochure has the title "Away" and was funded through the Vision Board.
- Sandy beaches – such an essential component of the British seaside experience – have returned to Morecambe. For many years the main beaches have had very little sand but following completion of the seventh phase of the coastal defence works, there is now sand on the two amenity beaches and better public access to them.
- Work to coastal defences has also brought improvements to the Sandylands section of the promenade between The Battery and Heysham, including new lighting, activity areas and improved beaches.
- The West End Gardens in Morecambe have also been completed, including a new café, and have greatly enhanced the western end of the seafront. The scheme was designed in close consultation with the local community, including schools.
- Both Tourist Information Centres have now been extensively refurbished and have re-opened as modern Visitor Information Centres in both Lancaster and Morecambe. Morecambe's Tourist Information Centre, located in the Old Station Buildings, was refurbished and re-opened in 2007. In Lancaster, the new VIC has been created as part of the Storey Institute Creative Industries Centre, with the help of external funding from Northwest Development Agency and Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board. This new VIC will be promoting the wider region as well as the local district.
- The reopening of the Storey Institute, with its improved galleries and performance space, as well as the new VIC, also provides an important new visitor attraction in Lancaster
- 60 Kilometres of cycle routes have been developed across the district. The Lune Millennium Park in Lancaster to Caton has 15 kilometres of traffic free cycle ways and paths.

The Tourism Strategy also highlights the potential to build on the District's cultural heritage offer, particularly in Lancaster, and a bid has been made to Northwest Development Agency to seek funding for development of a 10 year cultural heritage strategy for the District. It is hoped that this will help secure additional funding to

upgrade and improve some of the city's main heritage attractions and also its public realm.

Economic Impact of Tourism

The value of tourism for the local economy is assessed annually through an economic impact modelling system shared with the Tourist Board and with other local authorities throughout Lancashire, known as STEAM. The STEAM data for 2007 shows that the district had 6.71 million visitor days (staying and day visitors) and this generated £267 million for the local economy. Total tourists to the district in 2007 are reported as 4.62 million, up by 3% on 2006. An estimated 4,542 jobs (direct and indirect) are supported by tourism.

A breakdown of STEAM data for the sub areas of Lancaster, Morecambe, and rural areas showed that in 2007 total tourism revenue had increased in all parts of the District, with the highest growth (6%) in Lancaster, and 2% growth for each of Morecambe and the rural areas.

The 2008 destination benchmarking report has been received and this now gives us valuable data on tourists' perceptions of the district for every two years since 2002.

Tourism Marketing

Tourism marketing activity has included significant partnership working with Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board (LBTB), including participation in the 2008 and 2009 Taste Lancashire, Night Time Buzz, Family Fun and Country Escapes thematic marketing campaigns (print and e-media).

Contacts have been maintained with national, regional and local tourism stakeholders and strategic work done with national sector bodies including the British Resorts and Destinations Association, Tourism Management Institute and the Tourism Society. Continued involvement with DP:UK Coastal group and the Historic Towns Forum (formerly EHTF) resulted in the Historic Towns Forum's annual seminar and the North West Coastal Forum being hosted in Morecambe.

A redesigned Holiday Guide for 2009 has been produced, featuring the Midland Hotel on the front cover and using the existing City, Coast & Countryside branding. Other print has included the reprint and distribution of the Cycling for All leaflets in partnership with the Cycle Demonstration Team.

The service has also participated in a number of Direct Mailing campaigns to generate interest and visits from targeted markets, as well as attended the Great Outdoor Show and the BBC Good Food Exhibition. Familiarisation trips have organised with staff and local tourism businesses.

A new, well qualified, Tourism & Marketing Officer, Rachael Dyer, has been appointed (January 2009) to replace Jane Silvester who took up a new post at Lancaster University half way through the financial year (October 2009).

Recent marketing activity has included:

- Reviewing the strategic approach for visitor marketing and production of a Visitor Marketing Plan drawing upon previously commissioned research (STEAM, Destination Benchmarking).

- Launch of the 2009 Groups campaign including the production, print and distribution of a completely new District groups travel guide; Media coverage of the launch; Creation of new graphical exhibition equipment to promote the District to external markets; Attendance at the Great Days Out Exhibition (targeting the groups market).
- Launch of the 2009 welcome information (Easter) including new Visitor Attractions Leaflet and Visitor Information maps (Lancaster, Morecambe and NW versions).
- Review and cleansing of the Destination Management System (DMS), the District database (part of the wider LBTB database) containing all visitor product data for the Lancaster District (accommodation; attractions; events; retail; food and drink; activities). This data is then used as the principal source of information for all print and visitor information (VIC operating systems, visitor information websites).
- Review and design of the new visitor facing website for the Lancaster District (a microsite of the LBTB visitor website launching at Easter).

Other work has included supporting a number of ongoing development projects including:

- The creation of a private sector led umbrella organisation to represent and engage existing sector related organisations (such as Lancaster and District Tourist Association, Morecambe Hoteliers Association);
- The creation of an Eric Morecambe RHS award winning garden to be sited in Morecambe;
- The launch of a leisure hovercraft service in Morecambe Bay;
- Support of Travelodge Hotel Planning application (Morecambe).

Tourism website

During 2007 there were 124,595 unique visitors to the official visitor website (www.citycoastcountryside.co.uk) and this grew to 181,149 for 2008, an increase of 46%. Over this same period, the number of hits on the visitor website almost doubled from 7.8 million in 2007 to 15.3 million in 2008.

Overseas students' reception

Following discussions between Council's economic development service and Lancaster & Cumbria Universities about the economic potential of their overseas links, the Council's Overseas Students reception was reinstated this year (on a trial basis) with a new format. This was designed to maximise the impact of the "civic" welcome to the city, combined with a strong sell on the tourism offer. The revised event was held on 23rd October and was very successful, with over 150 students attending. It is hoped that the event will encourage increasing numbers of overseas students to bring friends and family for visits to the District during and after their studies at the two Universities.

Events throughout the district

Festivals and Events

The year started with great expectation, Councillors John Barnes and Roger Dennison brought forward the idea of a spectacular event provisionally named 'Look Out to Sea', which would have been held all over the district during April. They had contacted the Navy, Army, Royal Air Force, Coastguard, R.N.L.I., Cadets, Veterans, Schools, Fishermen and others, who all seemed eager to be involved.

It would have been:

- Entertainment - for tourists and residents;
- Education - i.e. lectures in schools;
- Employment – recruitment to the forces.

Unfortunately as the Credit Crunch began to bite, promises started to be retracted, and reluctantly the event had to be disbanded for the present time.

I was delighted to see so many people enjoying the festivals, the Promenade was packed with tourists and locals enjoying these events, and it was a great relief when Council agreed to once again finance the Kite and Sandcastle Festivals.

The Lancaster Firework Spectacular was as popular as ever, and encourages families to watch this event rather than risk the dangers of small individual fires.

Future

We feel confident more tourists will be spending holidays in the U.K., therefore we are anticipating sharing our Historic City, fantastic views across the bay, walking along our fabulous promenade and enjoying our beautiful countryside with a record number of tourists during 2009.

Another up and coming holiday trend around here is numerous permanent static caravan sites, all these people spend money in our area.

The Winter Gardens, due to a few dedicated people has begun to see the light at the end of the tunnel and hopes to open in the not too distant future.

Lancaster Town Hall Centenary Celebrations

2009 is the Centenary year for Lancaster Town Hall and the Ashton Memorial and I am pleased to report that, towards the end of 2009, there are events planned which will mark these important anniversaries. Something to look forward to, these will include an Edwardian Themed Fireworks festival and a Choral Concert in the Ashton Hall.

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