

CABINET

Brand Engagement Exercise Update 25 June, 2013

Report of Head of Regeneration & Planning

PURPOSE OF REPORT			
To update members on the outcomes of the brand engagement exercise			
Key Decision	X	Non-Key Decision	Referral from Cabinet Member
Date of notice of forthcoming key decision	6 June, 2013		
The report is public			

RECOMMENDATIONS OF COUNCILLOR SANDS

- (1) That Cabinet endorses the findings of the brand engagement exercise as the basis for preparing a brand development plan for Lancaster District.
- (2) That officers work with partners to prepare the brand development plan for future Cabinet consideration/approval.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Corporate Plan includes an action to produce a Brand Development Plan. What is meant by brand in this report is the position we seek to own in people's minds when they think of our district, the reputation we hold and the values we provide our visitors that make the experience we provide unique.
- 1.2 It also commits us to greater partnership working. Both Lancashire County Council and Marketing Lancashire agree that the growth and development of Lancaster district is critical to the wider economy of the county.
- 1.3 For some time there has been concern that the current city, coast, countryside "brand" whilst being effective with local citizens has lacked distinctiveness for visitors and therefore not achieved maximum awareness of the destinations within the district. In addition we have had some evidence about how the district is perceived by potential visitors who could but do not currently come to our district. With so many major regeneration projects now in development this is the right time, from the visitor and business economy perspective, to raise our profile, strengthen our messages and improve the quality of what is on offer to visitors and investors.
- 1.4 Creating a relevant and up-to-date brand development plan is a major undertaking but is essential if the significant benefits arising out of developments such as Lancaster Castle and the Canal Corridor are to be fully

captured. The first stage in creating a brand development plan is a brand engagement exercise. This was undertaken in the first half this year and the results are summarised below. Cabinet is now asked to endorse the findings of this exercise as the basis for the next stage of work which is developing the actual brand development plan.

The brand engagement exercise

- 1.5 The brand engagement exercise covered two distinct (although overlapping) areas. Firstly, the branding and marketing of the area as a visitor destination. Secondly, a similar exercise to inform how we approach selling our district to investors. The work has been part funded by Lancashire County Council and has been carried out in close co-operation with Marketing Lancashire. It included extensive desk top research together with over twenty “1-2-1” interviews with stakeholders from business, tourism attractions, local authority, tourism bodies, Duchy, Lancaster University, AONBs, arts partners and more. This was followed up with a stakeholder workshop which tested emerging thinking about the distinctiveness of the district and levels of understanding about our key assets and was a key stage developing the positioning, personality and brand essence of the district.
- 1.6 A similar exercise was carried out with major businesses and business focussed organisations with the aim of developing an inward investment branding strategy and, in turn, market the district as a place in which to invest, work and live. This included reviewing and analysing the nature of the district as a business location, consumer testing and stakeholder engagement.

Results/Outcome Visitor Economy

- 1.7 The outcomes of the “1-2-1” interviews and workshop both demonstrated strong consensus for two clear brands:
- Lancaster – a historic and cultural city, appealing to people interested in the cultural offer often without children or families. The Lune Valley was seen as an extension of the Lancaster offer; and
 - Morecambe Bay – a natural and beautiful area with a wide range of outdoor activities, stretching from Glasson Dock right the way through Heysham, Morecambe and Carnforth to Arnside/Silverdale and beyond. This was seen as appealing to families and those looking for outdoor activities.
- Morecambe (including Heysham) is by far the biggest centre of population around the Bay , with a ready made visitor infrastructure, albeit in need of investment and refreshment. As such it continues to attract significant numbers of visitors. Construction of the M6 link and implementation of our regeneration plans will reinforce this leading position. However, by promoting itself as the urban heart of the Morecambe Bay offer, there are obvious opportunities for Morecambe to take advantage of new audiences, particularly outdoor adventure/nature tourists, who traditionally may have chosen to head further north to the Lake District.
- 1.8 The outcomes of this exercise have been consumer tested, locally and around the Manchester area (one hour plus drive time), with consumers

representing families and people without children (students, couples, those whose children have grown up). Their views largely matched the stakeholder group findings, demonstrating two areas of clear and distinct appeal.

Results/Outcome Inward Investment

- 1.9 Despite the group having a high proportion of businesses operating in the Morecambe/Heysham area, they were clear that in terms of inward investment the focus should be on Lancaster first, with the university being a major draw. In their words, 'the rest will follow.' In terms of key strengths, they highlighted its central position in the UK, strong transport links (M6 link seen as huge boost), relatively good value cost of land, labour costs and rents, seen as particularly important to overseas investors. The group was also interested in the development of a forum to collaborate further.

2.0 Proposal Details

- 2.1 Developing our place brands requires partnership buy in. The exercise outlined above has begun that process and enabled a wide range of partners to work together to clarify:

- What we are trying to achieve;
- What our strategic position for our district is; and
- How we position ourselves and others buy into that.

The city council has subsequently been approached by a number of partners who have been involved in the process and who are keen to work together to move to the next stage.

- 2.2 The next stage is to share the findings with partners and in turn, the city, county and Marketing Lancashire work with relevant partners to develop brand implementation plans including creatives, toolkits and marketing delivery plans.

- 2.3 For the visitor economy, these would be:

Morecambe Bay Brand

Morecambe Bay Partnership, which brings together Cumbria Tourism, Marketing Lancashire, SLDC, Lancaster City Council, Arnside/Silverdale AONB, Bay Tourism, RSPB and others, already exists as a vehicle to progress this work

Lancaster Historic and Cultural City

A number of key stakeholders including the university, arts partners, chamber, county and Marketing Lancashire, AONBs, have already indicated their desire to work towards this.

- 2.4 For inward investment marketing purposes, this would be:

Lancaster as a centre for inward investment

This will involve working with the private sector, alongside the chamber, county and Marketing Lancashire to develop an implementation plan, developing clear messages that will help enhance the reputation of the area, collectively delivering the marketing of that plan to ensure the image the district wishes to project and messages it wishes to impart are reflected in

those materials.

3.0 Details of Consultation

3.1 A wide range of organisations representing local business, tourism businesses, business and tourism organisations and other relevant partners have been engaged in the process.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

	Option 1: To work with partners to develop all three plans	Option 2: To work with partners to develop some of the three plans	Option 3: Not to take forward
Advantages	Positioning Lancaster District's reputation and image so that it reflects the true quality of the offer available	Some improvements to the district's reputation and image	The council may decide not to deliver tourism services and therefore take the savings
	Positioning Lancaster District so that its economy achieves maximum benefits achievable via inward investment and leisure tourism	Some benefits to the economy as a result of inward investment or leisure tourism	
	A district prepared and ready to take advantage of the major regeneration initiatives planned	A district prepared and ready to take advantage of some regeneration activities	
	A coherent and partnership approach to development and implementation		
Disadvantages	Cost of funding further work on the Brand development Plan	Some aspects of district's leisure and commercial assets are undersold	District's leisure and commercial assets are undersold
			Lancaster District economy fails to achieve maximum benefits achievable via inward investment and leisure tourism
			District not fully prepared or able to take advantage of the major regeneration

			initiatives planned
			Risk of some partners becoming disillusioned with lack of action and going off and developing inconsistent and incoherent sporadic approaches and therefore failing to maximise true potential created by joint development and delivery
Risks	The success of brand development plan is reliant upon the appropriate resources and support of partners	Risk of some partners becoming disillusioned with lack of action and going off and developing inconsistent and incoherent sporadic approaches and therefore failing to maximise true potential created by joint development and delivery	
	Council spending reviews for future years may impact on the ability to implement outcomes of implementation plans.	Council spending reviews for future years may impact on the ability to implement outcomes of implementation plans.	
		Visitor and investor spend goes elsewhere and the district fails to realise the significant benefits arising out of regeneration developments.	Visitor and investor spend goes elsewhere and the district fails to realise the significant benefits arising out of regeneration developments.

5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

- 5.1 Option 1. Creating a relevant and up-to-date brand development plan is a major undertaking but is essential if the significant benefits arising out of developments such as Lancaster Castle and the Canal Corridor are to be fully captured. The appetite for partners to work together to develop and deliver

this is also there.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 The future growth of the district's economy will rely heavily on the perception of the area in the eyes of potential investors and visitors. Previous research has shown that the reputation and image of the district does not reflect the true quality of the area and the offer available.
- 6.2 Major regeneration initiatives are planned for the next five years. To gain the maximum benefits from this investment, a wide range of complementary activities are required ranging from (for example) physical intervention in upgrading the public realm through to "softer" measures such as interpretation and marketing. It is essential that these latter activities are guided by a strong and clear brand and are delivered in a co-ordinated and consistent way.
- 6.3 The brand engagement exercise has brought a wide range of partners together to consider the nature of our district as a visitor and inward investment destination. This in turn has been tested with consumers both locally and from outside the district. The exercise has not only offered information on the approach to be taken to sell our district to visitors and potential investors but also brought together partners who would be keen to work alongside us in developing an implementation plan to ensure Lancaster District's reputation and image does reflect the true quality of the offer available and that our economy achieves maximum benefits achievable via inward investment and leisure tourism.
- 6.4 And the next steps are to work with those partners to develop a draft implementation plan for consideration by Cabinet. This will include developing visitor facing creatives, branding toolkit, marketing and delivery plans.
- 6.5 Whilst a precise timetable for completion of an implementation plan cannot be provided at this stage, it will be a priority area of work for the council and **any** proposed implementation plans, once developed, will be fed back into Cabinet in a timely manner to inform budget setting and planning.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

The development of our economy relating to inward investment and opportunities arising from our outstanding culture, heritage, entertainment offer, coastline and outstanding natural landscapes is set out as one of the council's current four core priorities.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, HR, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

It is considered there is no direct impact arising.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Legal have been consulted and there are no matters arising from this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications beyond existing resources at this stage, although clearly the extent of resources required will depend on the decisions of Cabinet. Financial implications of any subsequent development plans will be reported back in due course, for subsequent consideration and to inform future budgeting.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Human Resources:

Some minor realignment of resources may be required

Information Services:

No IS requirements at this stage

Property:

Property have been consulted and no impact at this stage

Open Spaces:

No impact arising from this report

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

Given the Council's challenging financial outlook, it is imperative that any future development plans for branding are considered as an integral part of the Council's annual corporate planning and budgeting exercise, to inform future visioning, priority setting and resource allocation, given the Council's many competing demands. This is to help ensure that any plans ultimately adopted are of appropriate comparative priority, as well as being deliverable and affordable.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Draft Destination Branding Strategy

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