



Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Tourism and Promoting Chorley

Agenda and Reports

For consideration on

Wednesday, 28th March 2012

In Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Chorley

At 6.00 pm

This page is intentionally left blank

23 March 2012

Dear Colleague

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP - TOURISM AND PROMOTING CHORLEY - WEDNESDAY, 28TH MARCH 2012

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Tourism and Promoting Chorley to be held in Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Chorley on Wednesday, 28th March 2012 commencing at 6.00 pm.

AGENDA

1. **Apologies for absence**

2. **Declarations of Any Interests**

Members are reminded of their responsibility to declare any personal interest in respect of matters contained in this agenda. If the interest arises **only** as result of your membership of another public body or one to which you have been appointed by the Council then you only need to declare it if you intend to speak.

If the personal interest is a prejudicial interest, you must withdraw from the meeting. Normally you should leave the room before the business starts to be discussed. You do, however, have the same right to speak as a member of the public and may remain in the room to enable you to exercise that right and then leave immediately. In either case you must not seek to improperly influence a decision on the matter.

3. **Minutes - 11 January 2012 (Pages 1 - 4)**

To confirm the enclosed minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Tourism and Promoting Chorley held on 11 January 2012.

4. **Minutes - 22 February 2012 (Pages 5 - 10)**

To confirm the enclosed minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Tourism and Promoting Chorley on 22 February 2012.

5. **Draft Final Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Tourism and Promoting Chorley (Pages 11 - 30)**

To consider the enclosed draft Final Report of the Review and make any amendments as necessary.

6. **Any other item(s) that the Chair decides is/are urgent**

Yours sincerely



Gary Hall
Chief Executive

Dianne Scambler
Democratic and Member Services Officer
E-mail: dianne.scambler@chorley.gov.uk
Tel: (01257) 515034
Fax: (01257) 515150

Distribution

1. Agenda and reports to all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Tourism and Promoting Chorley (Peter Wilson (Chair) and Matthew Crow, Marie Gray, Steve Holgate, Paul Leadbetter, Marion Lowe, June Molyneaux, Mark Perks and Geoffrey Russell for attendance.
2. Agenda and reports to Chris Sinnott (Head of Policy and Communications) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer) for attendance.

This information can be made available to you in larger print or on audio tape, or translated into your own language. Please telephone 01257 515118 to access this service.

આ માહિતીનો અનુવાદ આપની પોતાની ભાષામાં કરી શકાય છે. આ સેવા સરળતાથી મેળવવા માટે કૃપા કરી, આ નંબર પર ફોન કરો: 01257 515822

ان معلومات کا ترجمہ آپ کی اپنی زبان میں بھی کیا جاسکتا ہے۔ یہ خدمت استعمال کرنے کیلئے براہ مہربانی اس نمبر پر ٹیلیفون

01257 515823

کیجئے:

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Tourism and Promoting Chorley

Wednesday, 11 January 2012

Present: Councillor (Chair) and Matthew Crow, Steve Holgate, Paul Leadbetter, Marion Lowe, June Molyneaux, Mark Perks and Geoffrey Russell

Officers: Chris Sinnott (Head of Policy and Communications), Teri Jones (Communications Manager) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

Also in attendance: Marianne Howell (Lancashire County Council), Jeanette Marshall (Best Western Park Hall Hotel), Ian Robinson (Chorley Little Theatre) and Diane Scarborough (Lancashire County Council)

12.TPC.16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Marie Gray.

12.TPC.17 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

No declaration of any interest were received.

12.TPC.18 MINUTES

That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Tourism and Promoting Chorley meeting held on 12 October 2011 be confirmed as a correct record for signing by the Chair.

12.TPC.19 TOURISM INFORMATION

Members of the Group received statistical information from the Visit England website that measured the number of trips made to an area, number of overnight stays and amount spent, between 2006 – 2010 for the fourteen districts across the Lancashire footprint.

The Communication Manager drew Members attention to the following:

- As expected, across Lancashire, Blackpool were the best performers overall, followed by Lancaster and Preston.
- Chorley fluctuated from being seventh in the table of Lancashire authorities to being 11th out of 14 authorities.
- Overall, the number of trips made had not changed much, although there had been a dip in 2007-09.
- The number of trips made to Chorley for holiday purposes had declined significantly over the period.
- The number of nights spent in Chorley had declined over time, as had the number of nights spent here on holiday. This did seem to be a general trend across Lancashire, although Blackpool and Lancaster had remained steady and Wyre and West Lancashire had increased.
- The amount spent in Chorley had increased from £4million in 2006-8 and 2007-9 to £5 million in 2008-10. This had moved us into equal ninth place.

Members commented that it was difficult to ascertain from the information if the spent actually related to visitors from outside the Borough or actual residents.

The representative from Park Hall, explained that Camelot Theme Park had been closed in 2008/9, so could be a major contributory factor for the dip in the number of trips to Chorley between 2007 and 2009.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

12.TPC.20 QUESTIONS TO THE REPRESENTATIVES

The Committee heard from a number of representatives that had been invited to attend and answer questions about their involvement in tourism around three key areas:

- What you do now in terms of tourism and events in Chorley.
- What your plans are for the future.
- How Chorley Council can work together with you in this area.

The Committee heard from:

1. Sandra Dempsey - Camelot Theme Park
2. Ian Robinson – Chorley Little Theatre
3. Jeanette Marshall – Park Hall
4. Marianne Howell and Diane Scarborough – Lancashire County Council
5. Hazel Gregory – United Utilities

A summary of each of the representatives comments is detailed below:

Camelot

Visitor numbers for 2011 were around 225,000, which was down on the previous year, this was mainly down to a poor summer and there had been a trend for a decline in visitor numbers over the years.

There were no plans to change the offer, as such to their target market as Camelot had spent many years establishing itself as a 'family attraction'. They did not promote any other places of interest within the borough, although they do work closely with Park Hall Hotel to offer the overall stay package, including the attraction Battlefield Live who were based at the same site.

Camelot had detailed records of where visitors come from by postcode, with their prime catchment area being an hour to an hour and half drive time away.

In previous years when Chorley Council had a designated Tourism Department, they had worked closely together to promote Camelot and Chorley whether this was in guides, at exhibitions or joint promotions. Camelot also felt that a more prominent presence on the Chorley website would be helpful as they had struggled recently to get any presence.

Chorley Little Theatre

The theatre had recently undergone major restoration work that had seen a £150,000 face lift.

The majority of people that attended the performances at the theatre were largely from across the Lancashire area, although they had visitors from as far as Wales.

The theatre had been recently successful in attracting a number of well known touring comedians, this had helped to put the theatre on the map and people were now coming from further afield for these shows. The theatre sent out information about up and coming shows and events to previous customers via email.

Another success had been the showing of 'An Inspector Calls', this had been on the school GCSE syllabus and the show had generated a large number of school based coach trips. It was not always possible to run this type of show, due to a number of different factors, but the theatre were considering showing Romeo and Juliet next season.

The theatre had tried to negotiate a deal with the local restaurants, whereby they would offer a nominated discount if the theatre recommended them. People often asked for this kind of information when attending one of the theatres performances, however after many efforts on behalf of the theatre, the take-up from the restaurants had been poor.

They also commented that they thought that the Councils website tourism content was poor and that more could be done to promote the town assets around the town, particularly around the use of the community noticeboards.

Members commented that in previous years, the theatre had teamed up with Astley Hall.

Park Hall Hotel

Although Camelot Theme Parks sits with the grounds of the Park Hall complex, they are completely separate businesses, although they do work together to give visitors the complete package in terms of staying overnight to get the most out of their visit. The Hotel has two themed rooms, Cadbury's/Bassett, designed and there are plans to develop the family product further.

Park Hall have also looked at offering other joint promotions with other attractions in the area that included, Botany Bay and Go Ape. They do promote other attractions within the North West on their website, but admittedly not many of them were actually Chorley based. They had also stopped displaying leaflets of local places of interest as they did not actually receive any. The Hotel also commented that they were disappointed with the content on the Councils website in relation to places that people visiting Chorley could stay at.

The Hotel offers a wide range of entertainment including medieval banquets, leisure activities and cabaret shows.

They also have a conference side and find that they are catering a lot more in the business side of tourism.

The Hotel is part of the Best Western chain and offers a reward scheme, whereby for every pound spent, the customer receives seven points that can be redeemed at other Best Western hotels in the country.

United Utilities

United Utilities work closely with all Local Authorities within the West Pennine Moors Partnership, including Chorley. They produce reports and attend meetings of the various advisory groups. They also work very closely with the Council's Conservation

Officer and the Neighbourhoods teams to deal with a variety of issues that included, dog fouling, lost dogs and flytipping.

Rivington County Park, is extremely popular with visitors and the area cannot cope with the vehicular traffic that already visits the area, this meant that they do not actively advertise to attract additional visitors. Information is available on their website and they were in the process of updating the information available on Rivington, both onsite interpretation and on the website.

Rivington is steeped in history and has many areas of interest that included the terraced gardens, Liverpool Castle and Rivington Pike. There are many footpaths and bridleways enabling a variety of recreational pursuits from easy family walks, gentle bike rides through to rambling across the moors and the recently established Go Ape course. Rivington also has toilets, cafes and parking facilities.

The provision of a regular bus service to the area could vastly improve access for those without their own transport and help reduce the number of cars in the area.

The public rights of way are the responsibility of the Council to maintain and more work on these would improve the visitor experience and make it safer. Rivington Pike is owned by Chorley Council and is visited by thousands of people on Good Friday every year, yet there are no staff from Chorley present on this day, neither do the Council assist with the clean up involved on the Saturday.

Library Services

The Library hosts various events and displays throughout the year. They have a large collection of heritage based information, for example, information Myles Standish that people from all over the country do come to see.

They also offer a family history service that is widely used by residents in the Borough and by people further afield who are interested in ancestry.

Lots of people use the libraries web facilities and they try to display as many leaflets about places of interest and events across the Borough that they can.

Lancashire County Council have just undergone a major reorganisation of the Tourist Information Centres/Boards and it was anticipated that this service would now transfer to the local libraries.

The Chair thanked all the representatives that had attended the meeting.

Although the Members were generally satisfied with the level of response given by the representatives, they felt that there were certain areas where they would benefit from further scrutiny and therefore requested that the following representatives be invited to the next meeting of the Group:

- Mr Neville Kidd – Rivington Manager, United Utilities
- Mr Ian Watson – Head Cultural Services, Lancashire County Council
- Mr Chris Bryan – Astley Hall and Arts Officer, Chorley Council

Chair

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Tourism and Promoting Chorley

Wednesday, 22 February 2012

Present: Councillor Peter Wilson (Chair) and Matthew Crow, Marie Gray, Steve Holgate, Paul Leadbetter, Marion Lowe, June Molyneaux and Geoffrey Russell

Officers: Chris Sinnott (Head of Policy and Communications) and Ruth Rimmington (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

Also in attendance: Chris Bryan (Astley Hall and Arts Officer), Ian Watson (Head of Cultural Services, Lancashire County Council), Neville Kidd (Rivington Manager, United Utilities) and Hazel Gregory (United Utilities)

12.TPC.22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mark Perks.

12.TPC.23 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

Councillor Marion Lowe – Chairman of the Friends of Astley Hall.

12.TPC.24 QUESTIONS TO THE REPRESENTATIVES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the representatives who had been invited to attend as witnesses. These were Chris Bryan, Astley Hall and Arts Officer, Chorley Council, Ian Watson, Head of Cultural Services, Lancashire County Council, Neville Kidd, Catchment Manager, United Utilities and Hazel Gregory, United Utilities.

Discussion with Chris Bryan, Astley Hall and Arts Officer, Chorley Council

1. Do we currently gather any information about where visitors to the Hall and events in the walled garden travel from? If not, do you think it would be practical to do this?

We do not collect monitoring information on visitors to the Hall. Although, there is a visitors book and anecdotal evidence from staff which suggests visitors are mainly from Chorley. There have been visitors from USA/Australia in the past. Going forward monitoring information will be collected.

In relation to events in the Walled Garden the Big Drum Day event attracted 25% of visitors from outside the Borough and 25% came from outlying areas within the Borough. In total 2,000 people came which is excellent considering there isn't much advertising undertaken.

For the Shakespearean play one third of visitors came from outside Borough (for example Wigan and Bolton) and the rest were split equally from the urban core and parishes within the Borough.

2. Have you got any suggestions for how the Hall could be marketed to visitors from outside the borough?

There is a need to increase the quality of the visitor experience, the profile of the Hall and to increase publicity surrounding it. There is potential to develop links with Lancashire Life and to improve the content on the Council's website.

Visitors do give negative feedback on the website as they find it difficult to navigate and the content is not always in reader friendly format.

There are plans to revamp the website and to improve the experience of visiting the Hall up to the standard of other museums.

3. Are there any plans to use the Hall and coach house more extensively for weddings and conferences?

Last year there were 15 weddings. The weddings package is currently being redesigned as in the past we could only offer facilities for the ceremony itself. Now that the coach house and walled garden had been refurbished the whole event could be held within the Park. There was potential for customers to hold their reception in the Lancastrian in the future.

Up to this point there had not been a huge amount of promotion on the conference facilities, but this would be increased going forward.

4. What are the key limiting factors for hosting events in Astley Park?

The biggest issue is the car parking capacity. We have tried different parking strategies for the picnic in the park event but have not yet found an ideal solution.

The second biggest issue is finding good event co-ordinators.

5. Do we do work with accommodation providers in the surrounding area to encourage people staying in hotels to visit the hall and park?

Not at the present time, but we would welcome some literature and the opportunity to work with accommodation providers.

6. Does the Hall and surrounding area have a business plan used to secure visitors?

There isn't a business plan, but there is a forward plan. This is mainly for the purpose of retaining accredited museums status and includes the conservation of the Hall and an integrated events programme. It is not focussed on publicity.

Members asked Chris several supplementary questions.

Could more orchestra concerts be held?

If over 500 people attend there are parking issues. If events attract local people there are increased difficulties with parking, whereas it is easier to direct visitors who do not know the local area to town centre car parks.

Would it be possible for some of the artefacts that are held by the Hall to be displayed?

With the refurbishment of the Coach House we now have more room to display items. There is an exhibition entitled "Portrait of Astley" coming this year.

Could the field at the bottom of the Park be used to create a car park?

A variety of car parking facilities have been considered, but not the use of the field as of yet.

Could the Hall and Park have it's own website?

A section of the Council's website could be set aside specifically for the Hall and Coach House that could have its own look and feel. Something that befits a high quality tourist attraction.

Councillor Marion Lowe advised that assistance with car parking during events could be given by the Friends of Astley Hall.

Chris confirmed that it was possible to erect a marquee in the walled garden and that weddings could be held outside the season. Chris noted the ideas suggested to host a food festival and the creation of a DVD for publicity purposes.

The Chair thanked Chris for his attendance and input into the inquiry.

Discussion with Ian Watson, Head of Cultural Services, Lancashire County Council

1. What do you think the key asset is in the borough to encourage tourism (visitors from outside the borough)?

I have some statistics about visits within Lancashire gathered by the Tourist Board which shows the spread of visitors and what they want to do.

Eating out	38%
Shopping	34%
Illumination	31%
Walking	30% (town trails)
Visiting coastal	27%
Family attractions	22%
Friends & relatives	19%
Car touring	17%
Countryside walks	16%
Visiting	12%
Museums historic house garden	8%
Music events	8%
Other	?
Cycling	2%

The North West Development Agency did look into how to capitalise on the attractions within Blackpool and how to divert visitors to stop off at other areas around Blackpool. Additional information is available from the Arts Council.

We need to make the best of the assets we have in the County. The Tourist Board looked at heritage across Lancashire on the basis that if people are interested in one historic house they are interested in others.

Research has found that visitors tend to stay longer if there is a coffee shop, although most attractions in Lancashire do not retain a visitor for a full day, unlike Blenheim Palace for example.

Lancashire County Council (LCC) has set up a joint task group, consisting of 6 Lancashire County Councillors from Preston, Lancaster, Blackpool and Blackburn Councils.

Previous arts was funded locally and it was unclear where the split of responsibilities lay but Lancashire County Council will be taking a strategic approach. There is a pot of £500,000 funding and LCC are reviewing where the money is spent. The focus going forward will be niche marketing.

The aim was to increase visitors and the amount of cash they spend when they come. If visitors stay overnight they will visit more things. A single borough might consider joining forces if they have not got enough to attract visitors for a 2 night stay.

The Tourist Board have lots of data if the Task Group would like any more information, although now the Tourist Board has been dissolved the focus from LCC will be on marketing Lancashire as a whole. This fits in with the Lancashire Enterprise Board and it's aim of raising the profile and visibility of Lancashire.

2. Is there anything that the Council is doing at the moment that you think hinders tourism?

There is nothing adverse that the Council is doing and Chorley does not have an image problem, it's more about reinforcing the image. Some places have a reputation

and identity. Chorley is somewhere visitors would go for a day rather than overnight stay in my opinion.

3. How could we better work together to encourage tourism in Chorley?

The use of brown signposts within Lancashire could be improved and Chorley is fortunate to be situated just off the M6. There are lots of potential visitors to be won.

County Councillor Jim Laurenson has set up a task group to investigate this and has spent time considering brown signs with the highways department at LCC and Highway Agency on this. LCC highways are being more relaxed on this issue than in previous times. Chorley has good provision in relation to brown signs.

Chorley has a range of attractions, like Botany Bay and Astley Hall. Variety is a good thing when it comes to attracting tourists.

Consideration has been given to producing one publicity booklet with all attractions with it or producing a number of themed booklets, but there is no one solution. Potential themes were walking, historic houses etc. A heritage trail for Lancashire has been considered, to publicise the 400 year anniversary of the Pendle Witch Trials.

Annual festivals, such as music festivals have been considered, but the weather would be a concern and the right kind venue would be needed. There is potential to review the funding currently received by theatres and fund festivals instead.

Ian confirmed that the information gathered by the Tourist Board incorporated questionnaires and telephone interviews from across Lancashire, but not Bolton or Wigan.

Members queried how use of the canal could be maximised and Ian advised that he had met with British Waterways the previous day. They are becoming a trust later in the year and would retain responsibility for boats using the canals and tow paths.

Members noted the signage needed to be focussed on pedestrians and cyclists as well as cars. There is a need for signage when visitors arrive at their destination, not just on the route in.

Attempts are made to get repeat visitors, by providing a good arrival experience, toilet facilities, well positioned and appropriate street furniture and information finger boards on poles etc.

There is a need to be sensible about targeting visitors, to realise the strengths of the district and capitalise on these. Chorley may be a secondary location for a day trip or weekend away i.e. the first being Blackpool.

There is a niche for certain activities, e.g. cycling or adrenaline sports. Lancaster has heritage to offer.

4. What is the role of Lancashire County Council in providing tourism information in the local library?

There are three tiers of information given at a Tourist Information Centre (TIC) – information, advice and guidance. Libraries could provide information, but staff do not currently have the background knowledge to give advice. Libraries also hold information on bus routes.

It is possible and likely that the role of the libraries will be increased to include the TIC. LCC are not planning to close any further libraries or reduce opening hours. If this change is implemented it will be at the top tier of information (guidance). There are some practical differences in the role of library assistant and tourist information

assistant, it is a difficult one, but the visitor economy is becoming more important. This wouldn't be at all 74 libraries, just the main ones.

The Chair thanked Ian for his attendance and input into the inquiry.

Discussion with Neville Kidd, West Catchment Manager, United Utilities and Hazel Gregory, Co-ordinating Ranger, United Utilities

Neville gave some background to the involvement of United Utilities in Rivington and advised they were, in the first instance, a water company. They were also an extensive land owner (around 142,000 acres).

1. What links do you have with other local authorities?

We have a long standing working relationship with Rivington and Brinscall Local Advisory Group and the WPM in general. This includes Chorley Council but also all other local authorities involved in this area.

2. Do you have any ways of working with these Councils that we could benefit from?

Each area has its own LAG, the Rivington and Brinscall group covers this area. We have a good relationship with Ian Heywood, Senior Planner (Conservation) here at the Council although our relationship with other groups could be described as strained.

3. Do you have strategy in place to encourage visitors/the use of the Rivington area? If so, what are the main objectives?

There is no strategy as Rivington is at capacity for the number of visitors it receives. We don't advertise at all.

As there is no charge for car parking no income is generated from the visitors by United Utilities, yet the visitors use the toilets, footpaths and bridleways which need to be maintained. There are plans to replace the top road to the Barn which will cost United Utilities £100,000. We also spend around £90,000 a year on clearing up litter, including fly tipping.

4. What do you think the key attributes of the Rivington area are that attracts visitors?

It is beautiful countryside and doesn't cost anything to visit.

5. Is there anything that the Council is doing at the moment that you think hinders tourism?

There is a lack of public transport as the buses don't run any more. They used to run on a Sunday and Bank Holidays. We do get a lot of visitors from Horwich as well as Chorley and surrounding towns.

6. Is there anything that the Council could do to help encourage more tourists to visit your attraction?

We have enough visitors! It is a honeypot site. There is a need to improve the car parking facilities.

Members asked Neville and Hazel a supplementary question. Are there facilities for sailing?

Yes, there are facilities for sailing. United Utilities are paid a small rent from Lancashire County Council for use of Lower Rivington Reservoir and the Anderton Centre. Activities are organised through clubs as United Utilities do not have the staff to facilitate activities.

Members noted several points:

- Rivington did not necessarily attract high spending visitors, but there was a wish to divert them to Chorley before or after their visit to Rivington.
- The facilities at Go Ape did attract high spending visitors.
- There had been high expectations of the impact of the Commonwealth Games, but these had not materialised.
- The Bowling Club and Chapel are privately run cafes.
- The area was quiet during the week with traffic congestion and parking issues.

Members noted that Rivington was a wonderful asset to the Borough.

Neville requested that it would be extremely helpful if the Council could provide assistance at busy events, such as on Good Friday particularly as the Council owns the Pike. For example, litter picking / ranger / staff help, on Good Friday possible supply of skips and or litter pick on Saturday before the fell race commences or supply / contribution to porta loos that are hired in for the weekend.

The Chair thanked Neville and Hazel for their attendance and input into the inquiry.

Chair

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Tourism and Promoting Chorley

March 2012



CONTENTS PAGE

	Page No
1. PREFACE	2
2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS	2 - 4
3. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION	5
4. FINDINGS	6 - 15
5. CONCLUSION	16

1. PREFACE

The Scrutiny inquiry into Tourism and Promoting Chorley was requested by Members of Chorley Council.

We collected evidence from a number of different sources including interviewing internal officers about Chorley Council's assets and events which contribute to the promotion of tourism within Chorley. We also spoke to representatives from external organisations to find out what they do in this area, to compare areas of best practice and find out how we could best work together in the future.

We also revisited the findings and recommendations of the Town Centre Vitality Scrutiny Review, particularly in relation to attracting more visitors to the town centre and its markets, to evaluate the progress made and to ascertain if there was anything that could be further improved on

The Group set out to identify Chorley's main assets for tourism around the Borough and the key events in the calendar that might attract people to visit Chorley. We sought to look at the opportunities, including partnership working that may exist to maximise the promotion of Chorley and encourage more visitors to its town centre and surrounding villages in the best possible way.

I would like to thank the Task Group Members for their deliberations, the Officers and external representatives who made a contribution to this report.



Councillor Peter Wilson
(Chair)

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked the Task Group to undertake a scrutiny inquiry to look at Tourism and Promoting Chorley.

Objectives

To further develop Chorley as a tourist destination by promoting the Borough's key assets and events and identifying other opportunities for making the Borough more attractive to outside visitors.

Desired Outcomes

A corporate directive for promoting Tourism in Chorley.

Task Group Membership

Councillor Peter Wilson (Chair)
Councillor Matthew Crow
Councillor Marie Gray
Councillor Steve Holgate
Councillor Paul Leadbetter
Councillor Marion Lowe
Councillor June Molyneaux
Councillor Mark Perks
Councillor Geoffrey Russell

Officer Support:

Lead Officer

Chris Sinnott Head of Policy and Communications

Democratic Services

Dianne Scambler Democratic and Member Services Officer

Meetings

The meeting papers of the Group can be found on the Council's website:

www.chorley.gov.uk/scrutiny. This includes the inquiry project outline and other relevant information on policy and procedures.

Contribution of Evidence

The Task Group would like to thank all those who have provided evidence and contributed to the Inquiry, including:

Sandra Demsey – Camelot Theme Park
Andy Brown – Parks and Open Spaces Manager, Chorley Council
Chris Bryan – Astley Hall and Arts Officer, Chorley Council
Louise Finch – Events and Marketing Manager, Chorley Council
Conrad Heald – Town Centre and Markets Manager, Chorley Council
Ian Robinson – Chorley Little Theatre
Marianne Howell - Cultural Services, Lancashire County Council
Diane Scarborough, Cultural Services, Lancashire County Council
Ian Watson – Head of Cultural Services, Lancashire County Council
Jeanette Marshall – Park Hall
Hazel Gregory – Co-ordinating Ranger, United Utilities
Neville Kidd – Rivington Manager, United Utilities

Recommendations

The Executive Cabinet is asked to consider the following recommendations:

Town Centre/Markets:

- That the Council look into the feasibility of advertising at the local train stations.
- That the Markets page on the Chorley website be linked to various other pages, where shoppers are seeking information about different types of markets.
- The Council looks into ensuring that Chorley comes up as a top hit in the Lancashire area as a market destination on the various search engines on the web.

Astley Hall:

- That the Council be asked to examine the potential to improve car parking facilities for the park to encourage larger events.
- That the Council develop and monitor visitor demographics to Astley Hall and Park.
- That a development plan be devised for the Hall, complex and park to encourage the use of the park and increase visitor numbers.
- To improve the presence on the councils website with a distinct feel to promote the Hall, park and other attractions.
- Develop marketing materials for the Hall and complex to promote weddings, conferences and other events.

Promotional:

- Examine options for better marketing attractions in the borough on the internet, for example through the Councils website.
- Review existing literature that promotes the borough and ensures that local attractions and accommodation have easy access to it so they can encourage visitors to stay in the area.
- To consider the provision of additional signage relating specifically to tourism across the borough.
- To exchange our promotional leaflets with other authorities, to better advertise our key attractions in like for like venues.

Partnership Working:

- That the Council investigate the possibility of providing Council support to United Utilities following Good Friday to tidy around the Rivington Pike area.
- Work with partners to improve public transport links to the Rivington area to ease traffic problems.
- That the traders be encouraged to remain open for business during the Christmas Light Switch on event.
- That schools across the Borough be contacted at the start of the new school year, at the beginning of September to be involved in the Christmas Light Switch On.

3. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

Evidence

The Group received and considered several reports and documents, these included:

1. The Final Report of the Town Centre Vitality Review.
2. The Executive Cabinet's response to the suggested recommendations of the Town Centre Vitality Task Group.
3. The latest monitoring report providing an update on the implementation of agreed actions by the Executive Cabinet to the recommendations of the Town Centre Vitality Task Group.
4. List of key tourism assets and events in Chorley.
5. Comparative statistics between Chorley and other districts in Lancashire available on the Visit England website.

Received presentations on

1. Astley Hall, Park and Coach House Complex and Yarrow Valley Park
2. Chorley Town Centre and its markets
3. Chorley's major calendar events.

Witnesses

The Task Group interviewed:

Sandra Dempsey - Camelot
Andy Brown - Chorley Council.
Chris Bryan - Chorley Council.
Conrad Heald - Chorley Council
Ian Robinson - Chorley Little Theatre
Marianne Howell - Lancashire County Council
Diane Scarborough - Lancashire County Council
Ian Watson - Lancashire County Council
Jeannette Marshall - Park Hall
Neville Kidd - United Utilities
Hazel Gregory - United Utilities

4. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4a) INTERNAL ASSETS AND EVENTS



Chorley Markets

Our thriving markets are a key part of the town's heritage, serving the people for more than 500 years and today the markets still continue to add a lot to the appeal of the town. There are two main areas which make up Chorley Markets:

- The famous Flat Iron (sometimes known locally as the cattle market) held on Tuesdays; and
- Chorley Covered Market, with static lock up stalls as well as casual availability.

On the Flat Iron, the old fashioned stalls have been replaced with brand new gazebo's that have red and white striped tops with pelmets saying 'Welcome to Chorley Markets'. The Gazebo's had been a recommendation of the Town Centre Vitality Inquiry and the take up by stall holders has been excellent, providing a much improved display and feel for shoppers.

Chorley also holds a monthly Farmers Market to bolster business for existing traders and hosts a wide variety of specialised markets, from continental to Christmas markets. All the markets are advertised regularly in a number of publications and the Tuesday Market attracts coach tours to the Town.

Anecdotal feedback from traders gives an idea of where customers are visiting from and it would seem that the residents of St Anne's' consider Chorley as a destination to visit. Events like the Christmas Light Switch on also attract people to the town and this year had been advertised on the roundabout near the Botany Bay complex. The town centre and its markets are also placed in good proximity to Astley Park.

The Group looked into whether more could be done to advertise the markets by using the web and social networking sites like facebook and twitter. The markets does have its own page on the Chorley website but Members thought that more could be done around linking this page to pages on other sites that shoppers may view and exploring the possibilities of Chorley coming up as a top hit when people are searching for markets information on web search engines such as google.

Advertising at the local train stations was also considered to be an effective way of attracting visitors and although this had proved to be costly on the past, the Group felt, it was worth revisiting this option to see if this could be achieved at a more competitive price.

Recommendations:

- **That the Council look into the feasibility of advertising at the local train stations.**
- **That the Markets page on the Chorley website be linked to various other pages, where shoppers are seeking information about different markets.**
- **The Council looks into ensuring that Chorley comes up as a top hit in the Lancashire area as a market destination on the various search engines on the web.**

Chorley Council Events

Chorley has two major events in the calendar:

- Chorley Smile Picnic in the Park.
- Christmas Lights Switch on

The Chorley Smile picnic in the park is an annual free summer event that attracts between, 1,500 to 4,000 people depending on the weather. The event delivers a mixture of entertainment including street theatre, sports activities, cartoon characters and local performers.

The event gets positive feedback from the attendee's who are mostly from within the Borough with some travelling from other parts of Lancashire or Wigan and results in an increase in visitors to Astley Hall.

The Christmas Light Switch on, is the annual town centre winter event that usually takes place at the end of November. It attracts between 1,000 – 2,000 people and is well received by the town traders, who also help to plan the event. The traders also arrange activities on the Saturdays in the run up to Christmas.

A survey conducted at the 2010 Christmas Lights Switch on event showed that attendee's:

- Mostly came from communities surrounding the town centre.
- Don't spend large amounts in the town centre during the event.
- Mostly found out about the event through the local paper.
- Travelled in the car or walked to the event.
- Liked all aspects of the event.

The Group felt that these results were disappointing, particularly in view of the fact that people were attending the event but not spending any money in the shops. The main reason for this was due to the shops not remaining open, during the event. So, although there was support from the traders for the event they are not helping to boost the economy of the town on this particular evening.

This year the range of Christmas lights had been extended and through an exchange scheme with Fylde Borough Council, lights had been erected around the town that had last year been displayed around the town of St Anne's. A night market was also held, to attract some shoppers to the event.

The Council continued to encourage the schools and voluntary groups across the Borough to participate in the event and a greater emphasis had been given to those projects. The Group commented that for schools to get involved more effectively they needed more time to plan and asked if they could be approached as early as the start of the new school year in September.

Recommendations:

- **That the traders be encouraged to remain open for business during the Christmas Light Switch-on event.**
- **That the schools across the Borough be contacted at the start of the new school year, at the beginning of September to be involved in the Christmas Lights Switch on event.**

Astley Hall and Park

The ‘Jewel in Chorley’s Crown’, Astley Hall is one of the most historical buildings in the North West of England. The magnificent 400 year old stately home is notable for its astonishing mid-17th century interior. Astley Hall provides a fascinating history of the families who lived there and is consistently rumoured to be haunted. It is also believed that Oliver Cromwell stayed at the Hall during the Battle of Preston in the 1600s. Astley Hall is located just minutes away from the town centre and is set in the beautiful grounds of Astley Park.

Since the re-opening of the refurbished Coach House and Walled Garden this area of Astley Park has become a popular visitor attraction for local people. Astley Hall and Coach House also acts as a tourist attraction and is well visited by people outside the area. The Hall and Coach House Gallery is generally open two days per week. April to December and typically welcomes around 13,000 visitors a year.

Café Ambio is the onsite café operating 7 days a week all year round, serving a wide range of hot and cold food the majority made using local produce (many seasoned by herbs from the walled garden).

Since the refurbishment there has been an increase in the number of visitors who reside in the outlying areas of Chorley. Although they may not be tourists in the traditional sense, they are people who previously were not regularly visiting or being involved in central Chorley activities.

The main draw for the more traditional tourist, ie. somebody who resides outside the Borough, is largely Astley Hall and some cultural events. The Hall itself gets visitors from across the North West, some from other parts of the County and around 200 people a year from overseas. Largely our overseas visitors are people with family or past connections in the area. The same can also be generally said from those visiting from other counties in the country; largely they are visiting friends and family in the area and are brought to the Hall for a day trip.

The Hall does attract a number of visitors from other areas of the North West who come to the area to specifically visit the Hall. It is largely people who have an interest in historic houses, who will research first and then plan their visit. The Hall is featured with in Simon Jenkins' 'England's 1000 Best Homes', where he opens with "Astley Hall is the most exhilarating in Lancashire". It is also great publicity for the Council amongst this particular group of people. Simon Jenkins is the current Chairman of the National Trust, so his recommendation carries particular credibility.

There is a need to increase the quality of the visitor experience, the profile of the Hall and to increase its publicity surrounding it and the Council has the potential to develop links with Lancashire Life and to improve the content on the Council's website.

The Tourist Board looked at heritage across Lancashire on the basis that if people are interested in one historic house they are interested in others. The Group felt that there was an opportunity here to exchange our promotional literature with other authorities. Research found that visitors tend to stay longer if there is a coffee shop, although most attractions in Lancashire do not retain the visitor for the whole day.

Lancashire County Council have also considered the production of one publicity booklet to advertise all the various attractions across Lancashire, or a number of theme booklets, for example, walking, and historic houses.

There have been some recent successes in jointly marketing the coach trips to visit both the Markets and the Hall as part of a combined day trip. The team are also in the early stages of collating an email list from visitors to the Hall in order to promote things better in the future. Although there is a forward plan, there is currently no business plan for the Hall.

Now that the coach house and walled garden have been refurbished, there is now the potential to cater more for weddings as the whole event can be held within the Park. There is also the potential for customers to hold their reception in the Lancastrian Room at the Town Hall. The Council's wedding package is currently being redesigned to better promote the facilities that are now available.

The majority of the 25 private guided tours that are run each year when the Hall is closed to the public are to groups from outside the Borough. The Hall also welcomes around 30 schools per year, which come from across the Chorley Borough and Lancashire.

Events such as the Big Drum Day, Nutcrack Night and Derian House's Winter Sparkle also attract a significant number of visitors from outside the area. The Council is also looking to develop its events programme to increase the number of quality events that are staged or hosted.

The art exhibition programme is a fine balance between providing a space for local artists to exhibit and also producing a programme of quality and interest that attracts people to want to visit. The Council stages around 10 exhibitions each year, aiming to concentrate on the best artistic talent in Chorley and the surrounding areas. The addition of the Coach House Gallery has enabled us to double our capacity in this area and the perfect setting of the gallery has made it a well sought after space for artists from around the North West.

Apart from coverage in some books and guides such as the one already mentioned and promotional activities associated with certain events at the site, the Council does very little in way of marketing to outside visitors from outside the Borough.

Car parking for events within the Astley complex is an on-going issue which needs further investment but there is scope to develop this side of the facilities of the park.

Recommendations:

- **That the Council be asked to examine the potential to improve car parking facilities for the park to encourage larger events.**
- **That the Council develop and monitor visitor demographics to Astley Hall and Park.**
- **That a development plan be devised for the Hall, complex and park to encourage the use of the park and increase visitor numbers.**
- **To improve the presence on the councils website with a distinct feel to promote the Hall, park and other attractions.**
- **Develop marketing materials for the Hall and complex to promote weddings, conferences and other events.**
- **To exchange our promotional leaflets with other authorities, to better advertise our key attractions in like for like venues.**

Yarrow Valley Park

Yarrow Valley has significant ecological value and interest. It's most important feature is the presence of large areas of mature ancient woodland which makes up more than a third of the park (130ha) and Biological Heritage sites make up 60% of the park (180ha). The park is also home to a number of rare/nationally scarce plants and animals.

2011/12 has seen a significant increase in visitor numbers which coincided with the opening of the new natural play facility, Yarrow Rocks. This facility was brought together by contributions from several partners and is widely regarded to be the finest example of natural play in the region.

The last visitor survey in 2009 revealed that 26% of visitors came from outside the Borough of Chorley, generally in our neighbouring boroughs of South Ribble, Bolton and Wigan. These figures are based on the car park counts for the Birkacre Car Park, so therefore excludes visitors on foot and via public transport, or users of alternative car parks at Euxton, Dob Brow and Duxbury.

Yarrow Valley has held the Green Flag award for the past 7 years and always receives outstanding feedback from the judges and has accredited "Country Parks status" from Natural England which is valid for 3 years.

4b) EXTERNAL ASSETS AND EVENTS

Camelot Theme Park/ Park Hall Hotel

Camelot Theme Park is located on a 140-acre site near the village of Charnock Richard, 3 miles west of Chorley and set within the grounds of the Park Hall Hotel complex. The hotel offers visitors to the park the chance to stay overnight to make the most of their experience. The park is home to medieval shows, birds of prey and many rides, taking a target audience of families and younger children; the park also boasts numerous thrill rides and a rollercoaster.

Visitor numbers for 2011 were around 225,000, which had been down on the previous year, this was mainly down to a poor summer and there had been a trend for a decline in visitor numbers over the years.

Camelot have no plans to change the offer, as such to their target market as it has spent many years establishing itself as a 'family attraction'. They do not presently promote any other places of interest within the borough, although they do work closely with Park Hall Hotel to offer the overall stay package, including the attraction Battlefield Live who are based at the same site.

Camelot had detailed records of where visitors come from by postcode, with their prime catchment area being an hour to an hour and half drive time away.

In previous years when Chorley Council had a designated Tourism Department, they had worked closely together to promote Camelot and Chorley whether this was in guides, at exhibitions or joint promotions. Camelot also felt that a more prominent presence on the Chorley website would be helpful as they had struggled recently to get any presence.

Along with Camelot Theme Park, the Hotel does promote other attractions available in the North West areas, although admittedly not many are Chorley based. The company felt that a better working relationship could be maintained between the local hoteliers and Chorley Council if better links were provided on their website.

Chorley Little Theatre



Originally opened as Chorley' first electric cinema in 1910, Chorley Little Theatre has become a thriving arts venue in the centre of the town. Since 1960 it has been owned and operated by the amateur dramatics group CADOS, who have been putting on high-quality productions for over 75 years.

The theatre had recently undergone major restoration work that had seen a £150,000 face lift.

The majority of people that attended the performances at the theatre were largely from across the Lancashire area, although they had visitors from as far as Wales.

The theatre had been recently successful in attracting a number of well known touring comedians, this had helped to put the theatre on the map and people were now coming from further afield for these shows. The theatre sent out information about up and

coming shows and events to previous customers via email.

Another success had been the showing of 'An Inspector Calls'. This had been on the school GCSE syllabus and the show had generated a large number of school based coach trips. It was not always possible to run this type of show, due to a number of different factors, but the theatre were considering showing Romeo and Juliet next season.

The theatre had tried to negotiate a deal with the local restaurants, whereby they would offer a nominated discount if the theatre recommended them. People often asked for this kind of information when attending one of the theatres performances, however after many efforts on behalf of the theatre, the take-up from the restaurants had been poor.

They also commented that they thought that the Councils website tourism content was poor and that more could be done to promote the town assets around the town, particularly around the use of the community noticeboards.

Rivington County Park

Rivington Country Park is easily accessible for all residents and visitors to the North West region and is approximately 4 miles from junction 6 of the M61. Rivington is steeped in history and has many areas of interest including Rivington Terraced Gardens, Liverpool Castle and Rivington Pike. There are many footpaths and bridleways enabling a variety of recreational pursuits from easy family walks, gentle bike rides through to rambling on the moors and the recently established Go Ape course. The Park also has toilets, café and parking facilities.

As Rivington is extremely popular with visitors, the area cannot cope with the vehicular traffic that already visits. As a result, United Utilities who are responsible for the Park do not actively promote the area to attract additional visitors. Information is available on their website on all of their sites, including Rivington and they are in the process of updating the information available at Rivington, both in terms of onsite interpretation and on the website.

Public transport is poor and it was felt that the provision of a regular bus service to the area would vastly improve access for those without their own transport and help reduce the number of cars in the area.

United Utilities works closely with all the Local Authorities within the West Pennine Moors Partnership, including Chorley. They provide reports and attend the various Local Advisory Group meetings. United Utilities reported that they worked extremely close with the Council's Conservation Officer at Chorley and the Neighbourhoods Team, to deal with any lost dogs, dog fouling and fly tipping issues.

The Public Rights of Way in the area are the responsibility of the Council to maintain and more work on these would improve the visitor experience and make it safer for visitors. Rivington Pike is also owned by Chorley Council and this is visited by thousands of people on Good Friday every year, yet it was noted that there are no staff

from the Council present on the day to assist with the clean up that is involved on the Saturday.

Recommendations:

- **Examine options for better marketing attractions in the borough on the internet, for example through the Councils website.**
- **Review existing literature that promotes the borough and ensures that local attractions and accommodation have easy access to it so they can encourage visitors to stay in the area.**
- **That the Council investigate the possibility of providing Council support to United Utilities following Good Friday to tidy around the Rivington Pike area.**
- **Work with partners to improve public transport links to the Rivington area to ease traffic problems.**

Do the Group want to put anything in about working with with United Utilities to explore the possibly of the Rivington area hosting a major event that makes use of the locality??

4c) LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

The Tourism Boards hold a lot of data that can be provided upon request to Lancashire County Council. Although the various Boards have now been dissolved the focus will be on marketing Lancashire as a whole. This fits in with the Lancashire Enterprise Board and its aim of raising the profile and visibility of Lancashire.

Chorley is fortunate to be situated just south of the M6 motorway with the use of the brown signposts, of which Chorley has a good provision. There are lots of potential visitors to be won and it was recognised that extra signage could benefit visitors upon their arrival at their destination and needed to be more widely targeted to include pedestrians and cyclists.

There are three tiers of information given at a Tourism Information Centre (TIC), information, advice and guidance. Lancashire County Council is planning to move Chorley's Tourism Information Centre into the local town library. The staff would need to receive training as the role of the library assistant differs from that of the tourist information assistant, but as the visitor economy is becoming more important this is necessary to ensure good service provision.

Recommendations:

- **To consider the provision of additional signage relating specifically to tourism across the borough.**

5. CONCLUSION

Chorley has a good range of attractions that provides the variety needed to attract tourists. However, there is a need to be sensible about targeting these visitors, to realise our strengths and capitalise on them effectively. Chorley is more likely to be a secondary location for a day trip or a weekend away.

Chorley has the potential to lend itself to niche activities, like cycling or adrenaline sports and this is something that the Council may wish to consider exploring.

By improving on the content and providing better links, It is anticipated that the current redevelopment of the Councils website will help to improve our relationships with external providers and organisations that have a key stake in tourism within the Borough and help us to build on and create new partnerships to better work together to promote Chorley.

Chorley Council



2008-2009
*Transforming Services:
Citizen Engagement
and Empowerment*



2009-2010
Cohesive and resilient communities



2009-2010
Better outcomes for people and places

This page is intentionally left blank