

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 s 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 dis promote other attractions within the North West on their website, but admittedly not many of them where 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