

## **COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 7 September 2017 at 10.00 am.

### **PRESENT**

Councillors Brian Blakeley, Rachel Flynn, Tina Jones, Merfyn Parry, Arwel Roberts, Anton Sampson, Glenn Swingler, Andrew Thomas, Graham Timms (Vice-Chair) and Huw Williams (Chair)

Councillor Hugh Evans, Leader and Lead Member for Economy and Corporate Governance was in attendance at the Committee's request.

**Observers:** Councillors Meirick Lloyd Davies, Martyn Holland and Emrys Wynne

### **ALSO PRESENT**

Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition (RM), Head of Highways & Environmental Services (TW), Head of Customers, Communication & Marketing (LG), Countryside and Heritage Services Manager (HR), Team Leader – Tourism, Marketing & Events (PMcD), Senior Countryside Officer (DS), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE), and Committee Administrator (SLW)

#### **1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cheryl Williams

#### **2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Councillors Merfyn Parry and Graham Timms declared personal interests in item 5, "Denbighshire as a Tourism and Events Location".

#### **3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR**

No urgent matters were raised.

Responding to a query from Councillor Meirick Lloyd Davies on why non-committee members had been excluded from the pre-meeting briefing session, the Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised that the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group had asked the Committee to trial the effectiveness of holding a pre-meeting briefing session for committee members in enhancing the quality of the outcome of the scrutiny process. She agreed to raise with the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group at their next meeting in October whether non-committee members should be permitted to attend such briefings in future.

## 4 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 20 July 2017 were submitted.

Matters Arising – Item 7 – Consideration of Free Parking for Disabled Badge Holders.

Councillor Graham Timms raised the issue of an inaccurate article in the press regarding the charges for parking for disabled badge holders.

The Head of Customers, Communication & Marketing responded by informing Members that the report in the press had been vague but that Denbighshire had published the correct information in the first instance in its press release.

**RESOLVED** *that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2017, be received and approved as a correct record.*

## 5 DENBIGHSHIRE AS A TOURISM AND EVENTS LOCATION

The Leader, Councillor Hugh Evans, introduced the report (previously circulated) to detail the work undertaken by the Tourism Team to promote and sell Denbighshire as a tourism and events location with particular focus on partnership work with the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the development and refinement of the Events Application process and the innovation and development work undertaken.

The Leader advised the Committee that both he and the staff wanted to hear scrutiny's views on the work undertaken to attract tourists to Denbighshire and the effectiveness of the partnership approach taken with respect of tourism increasing the value of the tourist spend in the county. They were also keen to receive scrutiny's observations on whether the County's Tourism Strategy was sustainable and one that would effectively contribute towards the Council's long-term ambition of developing the economy. Denbighshire was fortunate that it had a wide range of tourist attractions. It also had three 'trunk' roads crossing the county along which thousands of tourists travelled to various holiday destinations in North Wales, the North West of England and the Midlands region. It was, therefore, important for Denbighshire's economy to entice the travelling tourists off the trunk roads to visit the county's towns, attractions, accommodation, eateries etc., to spend their money in the area.

The Team Leader (Tourism, Marketing and Events) outlined to the Committee the benefits to the Council and the county of the partnership work with Flintshire and Wrexham councils in relation to tourism and events work, particularly as Denbighshire only had a small number of officers working in the field. Officers from all three counties, as well as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) representatives, met as the North East Wales Tourism Partnership on a monthly basis to plan and progress work. In recent months they had:

- successfully secured £40K worth of funding from the Welsh Government (WG) towards promotional work for the 2018 Year of the Sea theme. Having regard to the fact that only a section of the North East Wales area actually

had a coastline the partnership had focussed its bid on 'routes to the sea' emphasising the tourist offer in the area on the way to the shore as well as the offer at the seaside and on the sea itself;

- been working closely with tourist based businesses on the Tourism Ambassador Scheme. They focussed on what various types of tourist businesses could do to promote other businesses which may benefit from tourists. Rural Development Programme (RDP) funding had recently been secured by Cadwyn Clwyd to enhance this scheme further via the development of a web-based model to attract more participants and ensure the Scheme's sustainability for the future;
- been involved with the car parks task and finish group's work exploring how the county's public car parks could be better utilised to signpost and promote the area's tourist attractions and businesses to tourists. This work was continuing.

With a view to supporting event organisers Denbighshire's Tourism Team had developed a new, far less cumbersome, 'events notification process'. Work had taken place recently to refine this process. As a result, event organisers would only be required to complete a two page notification form which would cover all aspects associated with holding an event, including licensing requirements, road closures etc. The use of this single notification process would be trialled from January 2018. It was now apparent that an increasing number of tourists were utilising social media sites for the purpose of obtaining tourist related information and it was therefore crucial that the Council regularly updated social media in an innovative manner. Whilst the use of social media for sourcing tourist information had been on the increase, this did not negate from the value of tourist information centres (TICs) of which there were two in Denbighshire, or Tourist Information Points (TIPs), of which there were three in the county.

Officers from Countryside Services and the AONB then outlined to the Committee how they worked closely with the Tourism Team to deliver the Strategy and sustainable tourism in the area. They referred to a number of initiatives which were being trialled at present in partnerships with local businesses, such as 'Eat, Stay, Do' and the 'Good Grub Club'. Plans were currently underway to try and link the activities associated with the turning on of Christmas lights in various north east Wales towns with Good Grub Club promotions and events.

Responding to members' questions the Leader and officers advised that:

- elected members were ideally placed to draw attention to all events and tourism initiatives taking place across the county. By using social media they could potentially increase the attendance levels at events or footfall in towns and villages etc. Officers would be more than willing to assist members who lacked confidence or experience with social media to familiarise themselves with its benefits and pitfalls;
- at the AONB's next meeting, discussions would commence on how the AONB could work with local villages and businesses to improve their visibility and raise their profile with people visiting the area to increase their income from tourism;
- the new on-line Tourism Ambassador Scheme for businesses was to be officially launched with local businesses. Local businesses would be

encouraged to join and share information, best practice etc. and mentor each other if appropriate;

- a campaign would be run to encourage local businesses to be part of the Tourism Forum. If they could not attend Forum meetings, their willingness to share information about events and initiatives with other local business people would be sought;
- work was currently underway to examine the feasibility of having TIPs located in the county's libraries, as well as Tourism Ambassadors visit libraries periodically. It was anticipated that because all libraries in the county now had free public Wi-Fi access, that tourists would be enticed to visit them to access electronic information;
- with respect to domestic coach tourism, progress had been much slower than anticipated across the county. However, Ruthin, via the Town Council's involvement was now making progress towards gaining Coach-Friendly Status accreditation;
- the county's nature reserves were gauged more towards communal, rather than tourist use. Although tourists were not prohibited from visiting them, these facilities were not advertised alongside tourist areas;
- they agreed with members that more should be done to market Denbighshire and the Prestatyn area as the 'beginning/end' of the Offa's Dyke National Trail with a view to enticing walkers to spend a few days in the area exploring it, visiting other attractions and utilising local businesses;
- preliminary work was underway, although at a very early stage at present, with a view to businesses in the Prestatyn area capitalising on tourists who visited the Gronant area to observe the Little Tern colony;
- the Council and Partnership had, via information received from answers given to the extra questions it had commissioned in the Visit Wales annual visitor survey, a fairly accurate visitor profile for the area. The majority of visitors seemed to be generally older women who had surplus disposable income. On the basis of this knowledge, work was currently underway to try and market the area to a cross-section of age groups;
- it had been extremely difficult to predict future trends in tourism. In the UK the weather was a significant contributor towards the success of the tourist industry in any one year. Another factor that impacted on tourism was the monetary exchange rate. However, at present the Wales and the North Wales tourism brands were regarded as extremely strong products. The North Wales and North East Wales tourism offer benefited greatly from their close proximity to other strong tourist brands, such as Liverpool, Manchester and the Midlands and were therefore attractive to visitors who wanted a mixed urban and rural holiday package;
- whilst the 'staycation' holiday brand had been popular in recent years, there was now an indication that this type of holiday may now have peaked in its popularity;
- that the previous Council's decision to set developing the economy as one of its corporate priorities was based on data which identified a disparity in earnings in Denbighshire compared to other counties. The priority for the economic development work undertaken to date was a combination of providing better support to existing & new businesses, and attraction of new higher value sectors to the county. St. Asaph Business Park was been the

main focus for the latter piece of work. This was because earnings from tourism tended to be lower than from other types of employment, with earnings from tourism in coastal areas also tending to be lower than in non-coastal areas – this issue had been highlighted in a recent national newspaper article;

- schools were regularly used to draw attention to and promote events being held in the county, as was radio marketing;
- officers and Good Grub Club participants were currently liaising with businesses in Liverpool to see if a version of the very successful Independent Liverpool Scheme could be run in the North East Wales area;
- the ‘decorated taxi’ promotion which had taken place in London during the summer, to draw attention to what was on offer in the North Wales area, had been an effective way of raising the area’s profile and had no costs associated with it;
- they were acutely aware of the shortage of overnight accommodation across the county. Consequently the Economic and Business Development Team were working hard to try and support the development of various types of holiday accommodation county-wide i.e. boutique hotels, glamping, affordable reputable hotels etc. However, whilst the AONB was consulted on planning applications, comments were not sought from the Economic and Business Development Team on how proposed applications were likely to impact on economic development in the area. Members cited a current application for a large hotel with proposed ‘lodge’ facilities in the county which in their view would benefit from Economic and Business Development Team’s observations on its economic impact being included in the report to the Council’s Planning Committee;
- gaining WG permission to erect signage next to trunk roads, including tourism signs, was a very complex and costly process. Permission had recently been granted to erect signs directing tourists to the Vale of Clwyd, the Council was now in the process of designing the scheme and sourcing funding for the signs;
- the Council did have a clear protocol with respect of the erection of temporary / unauthorised signs on the Highway for the purpose of advertising businesses and community events. This protocol had been examined by scrutiny during the term of the previous council. The protocol stated that organisers of community events should contact the appropriate Area Streetscene Coordinator, in advance, to agree suitable locations for any such signs.

**RESOLVED** that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972

Under Part II business and in response to a question from an elected member the Head of Highways and Environmental Services updated the Committee on the latest position with regards to Bodelwyddan Castle and Bodelwyddan Castle Trust. He advised that the promotion of the tourist facilities on the site were primarily the responsibility of the Castle Trust and the hotel owner, not the Council.

## **Part I**

Prior to concluding the discussion members emphasised the importance of:

- promotion of what was on offer in local towns and villages to people who visit the AONB and the Offa's Dyke path, particularly Council-run attractions i.e. Ruthin Goal, Nantclwyd y Dre and Plas Newydd, Llangollen. Efforts should also be made to support businesses that were located on the periphery of AONB to promote their offer to AONB visitors;
- the need to highlight to all partners, be they local businesses or national bodies such as CADW, the strong Welsh language and culture brand of tourism in the area;
- exploring the feasibility of having town and village name signs that include emblems to indicate which amenities and attractions were on offer there; and
- regular liaison/consultation between the Planning Department and the Economic and Business Development Team with respect of the potential economic impact of proposed developments (both positive and negative) and those comments being communicate to the Planning Committee.

The Leader thanked the Committee for their input and their in-depth examination of the matter.

The Committee:

**RESOLVED**, *subject to the above observations,*

- (i) to acknowledge the importance of ensuring that the Council's tourism plan and strategy were aligned to its overall economic development strategy in order to make sure that in the long-term maximum economic benefits are realised for the area, businesses and residents; and*
- (ii) that a further progress report be presented to the Committee in twelve months' time detailing the effectiveness of various tourism initiatives in delivering the Tourism Strategy and their contribution towards delivering the Council's ambition in relation to economic development.*

## **6 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

A copy of a report by the Scrutiny Co-ordinator, which requested the Committee to review and agree its Forward Work Programme and which provided an update on relevant issues, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

A copy of the Members Proposal Form had been included in Appendix 2. The Cabinet Forward Work Programme had been included as Appendix 3, and a table summarising recent Committee resolutions and advising on progress with their implementation had been attached at Appendix 4.

During the discussion on the Committee's Forward Work Programme, a number of members commented on how useful holding a pre-meeting briefing session for the Committee had been. On this basis they asked that the practice continue for the foreseeable future.

**RESOLVED** *subject to the above to approve the Committee's Forward Work Programme.*

**7 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES**

None.

**The meeting concluded at 11.55 a.m.**