



PROSPERITY POLICY PANEL

Date: 10th January 2007
Open Report

Report of: Rachel Booton, Scrutiny/ Committee Officer

VISITOR ECONOMY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. PURPOSE OF BRIEFING PAPER

- 1.1 The purpose of this briefing paper is to inform Members of the work of the Visitor Economy Task and Finish Group and to propose recommendations from the Prosperity Policy Panel to the Cabinet.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Visitor Economy Task and Finish Group was originally set up by the Environment and Economic Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Panel on 12th October 2005 to examine the local provision and co-ordination of the key visitor assets and attractions throughout the District, to ensure that they meet and contribute towards the success of the local economy.
- 2.2 Membership of the Group comprised Councillors Mrs F M Oborski, Mrs M H Baillie, Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis, Mrs J L Salter and J A Shaw.
- 2.3 The Group however, was unable to start the scrutiny exercise until 31st August 2006 as it had to wait until results of the Worcestershire Visitor Survey were available.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The Group was advised at the beginning of the exercise that many attractions in the District were privately owned and therefore, the Council would not have a great influence.
- 3.2 Whilst there appears to be no problem attracting visitors to tourist attractions in the District such as the West Midland Safari and Leisure Park, the Severn Valley Railway etc, the Group noted that there was also a need to attract visitors into the town centres.
- 3.3 The Group considered the results of the Worcestershire Visitor Survey and met with various stakeholders including the Town Councils, Town Centre Forums and also the Cabinet Member for Commercial Services.

3.4 The Group also noted that the Worcestershire Visitor Survey was a year old and therefore some improvements in the District had been made since the survey was carried out.

4. PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

4.1 One of the main issues to arise from the Worcestershire Visitor Survey was that the towns in Wyre Forest received low scores regarding public conveniences. The Cabinet Member for Commercial Services attended a meeting of the Task and Finish Group and explained that, following a scrutiny exercise regarding the provision and cleanliness of public conveniences, the Council's 2006/2007 budget contained capital money for spending on public toilets. The Council now has two toilet crews that work across the District. The Ladies toilets at Stourport Riverside will be extended to incorporate another six cubicles.

4.2 RECOMMENDATION:

Whilst accepting that some further expenditure has already been committed to improving public conveniences in the District, further investment be made to upgrade toilet facilities in the District, especially in the town centres.

5. FOREIGN LANGUAGE WEBSITE

5.1 The main tourism website for the District is www.wft.co.uk although it is not Council owned. This website is only available in English. At a meeting with representatives from Town Centre Groups, it was suggested that tourism websites could be translated into foreign languages, especially those languages of the twin towns and of those communities living in the District.

5.2 Despite the fact that the Council currently has the Ethnic Access Link Scheme which people can use to have Council documents translated, Members felt that the Council website should be translated into foreign languages. It was suggested that students from Stourport High School, which is a language college could assist with translation or that perhaps the twin towns could assist in translating as this would ensure accuracy.

5.3 It was noted that the Stourport Forward website was an excellent website although only available in English. The Bewdley Development Trust also had a good website, which was only available in English.

5.4 RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. The Council's website be translated into the languages of the twin towns and of those communities living within the District.***
- 2. A letter be sent to Stourport Forward, Bewdley Development Trust and the owners of the www.wft.co.uk website suggesting that they use foreign languages on their websites.***

6. LOW SPEND IN THE DISTRICT

6.1 From the Worcestershire Visitor Survey, the Group noted that there is not much spending in the District in comparison with other areas. This is probably due to the fact that there is a lot of cheap self catering accommodation and also people come on day trips to attractions like the Safari Park without going into the towns in the District. The Group therefore felt that there was a need to investigate why people were not visiting the town centres.

6.2 *RECOMMENDATION:*

As part of the Council's commitment for the town centres, Town Centre Partnerships be encouraged to work with visitor destinations to actively encourage people into the town centres.

7. TOWN CENTRE ISSUES

7.1 Bewdley

7.1.1 There was concern that in Bewdley, too many empty shops were being turned into pubs, restaurants or offices. Two shops had recently been turned into offices and Members were worried that Bewdley would soon have too few shops and too many office premises.

7.1.2 Members noted that a lot of smaller shop units in Bewdley would qualify for National Non Domestic Rate Relief (NNDR) and it would therefore be necessary to publicise the existence of NNDR Rate Relief to estate agents as it would assist small traders.

7.1.3 *RECOMMENDATION:*

The Economic Development and Tourism Manager produce a paper for all local estate agents drawing attention to the availability of National Non Domestic Rate Relief (NNDR).

7.2 Stourport

7.2.1 Although the Stourport Basins are undergoing refurbishment in conjunction with British Waterways and English Heritage, Bridge Street continues to cause concern.

7.2.2 Investment in the basins is just part of what is needed in Stourport. There is a need to attract visitors who will spend money but there is also a need to attract people into the town centre as well as to the basins.

7.2.3 The Group felt that it is necessary to change the mindset of businesses in the town to encourage them to improve the town's appearance as many premises are letting the town down. The improvement of shop fronts and

above the shops could give the town the edge to make it more attractive. An objective should be to change people's opinions of Stourport.

7.2.4 It would be easy for a small group of traders to do something to brighten up the towns and perhaps they could be encouraged to do this. When there had been a campaign to put hanging baskets up in Stourport a few years ago, it had been thought that this was not possible. It could be possible for the Town Council to re-investigate this issue. It was deemed necessary to find a way of encouraging the whole community in Stourport to work together.

7.2.5 RECOMMENDATION:

A letter be sent to Stourport Town Council requesting them to encourage local traders to brighten up the shop fronts and to re-consider the use of hanging baskets.

8.3 Kidderminster

8.3.1 Members felt that Kidderminster was in a worse position than other towns in the District because it had no Town Council. They did, however, feel that if the development of the site, known as KTC3 in Worcester Street, were to go ahead as planned, it could attract more people to the town.

8.3.2 Members noted the work of the Blackwell Street Revival Group, who had put up hanging baskets and vastly improved the appearance of Blackwell Street in Kidderminster. It was felt that other groups of traders should follow their example.

8.3.3 Kidderminster has few independent businesses and, therefore, suffers from shop managers who look after the business according to company rules without, much scope for individual initiative. It is hoped that a Town Centre Manager will be appointed in Kidderminster who will be able to generate funds for improvements. The Town Centre Manager would be a catalyst to pull together money and carry out projects in the town.

8.3.4 Members noted that the Thursday market and the Farmers' Market was attracting a lot of people to Kidderminster town centre. It was also noted that the Worcestershire Hub, based at the Town Hall should attract more people back into that area of the town.

8.3.5 The Group felt that a lack of street name signs in the town centre would cause confusion for visitors and suggested that Kidderminster could have heritage signs with the Kidderminster crest on them.

8.3.6 In a questionnaire response, it was noted that the public triangle at Weavers Wharf was not used at all and was not a focal point like it had originally been intended. It was suggested that the Council could work with the new owners of Weavers Wharf to put it to appropriate use.

8.3.7 RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. *Heritage signs with the Kidderminster crest be erected in Kidderminster town centre.***
- 2. *The activities of the Blackwell Street Revival Group be noted and commended.***
- 3. *The new owners of the Swan Centre be encouraged to decorate the centre (perhaps with hanging baskets).***
- 4. *The Council liaise with the new owners of Weavers Wharf to put the public triangle at Weavers Wharf to appropriate use.***

9. ROLE OF THE TOWN COUNCILS – FLORAL DISPLAYS

9.1 Members considered letters from nearby Town and District Councils in response to a letter sent from the Chairman requesting information on how their floral displays were funded and it was noted that floral displays were funded by Town Councils with assistance from community groups, charities and local businesses.

9.2 The Group suggested that contact be made with the churches on the main roads leading into the towns, to encourage them to brighten up their walls or graveyards. The Council could work in partnership with the Horticultural Society to encourage more floral displays. There was a need for partnership working with the Town Councils and Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership. It was suggested that the Charter Trustees could request a competition.

9.3 RECOMMENDATION:

A letter be sent to churches within the District drawing their attention to the “Best kept churchyard scheme” and encouraging them to brighten up walls and the churchyards.

10. PARKING FACILITIES

10.1 The Group noted that one of the issues affecting tourism in the District was that there were very few coach parking facilities. Stourport does not have this problem but in Bewdley, there are only two parking bays and in Kidderminster there is no designated drop off area.

10.2 RECOMMENDATION:

A designated coach drop off point and coach parking facilities be available in Kidderminster town centre.

11. ACCOMMODATION

11.1 The Group noted that there was a lack of places for young people to stay and there was concern that the District could not be a tourist area if there

was not much accommodation available. There was an increasing hotel base but if there was not a hotel for young budget travellers or for young couples with babies, this could restrict many visitors from coming to the District.

11.2 RECOMMENDATION:

The Council encourage proposals for hotel development in KTC3 to help provide budget accommodation in Kidderminster.

12. LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 12.1** *Whilst accepting that some further expenditure has already been committed to improving public conveniences in the District, further investment be made to upgrade toilet facilities in the District, especially in the town centres.*
- 12.2** *The Council's website be translated into the languages of the twin towns and of those communities living within the District.*
- 12.3** *A letter be sent to Stourport Forward, Bewdley Trust and the owners of the www.wft.co.uk website suggesting that they use foreign languages on their websites.*
- 12.4** *As part of the Council's commitment for the town centres, Town Centre Partnerships be encouraged to work with visitor destinations to actively encourage people into the town centres.*
- 12.5** *The Economic Development and Tourism Manager produce a paper for all local estate agents drawing attention to the availability of National Non Domestic Rate Relief (NDR).*
- 12.6** *A letter be sent to Stourport Town Council requesting them to encourage local traders to brighten up the shop fronts and to re-consider the use of hanging baskets.*
- 12.7** *Heritage signs with the Kidderminster crest be erected in Kidderminster town centre.*
- 12.8** *The activities of the Blackwell Street Revival Group be noted and commended.*
- 12.9** *The new owners of the Swan Centre be encouraged to decorate the centre (perhaps with hanging baskets).*
- 12.10** *The Council liaise with the new owners of Weavers Wharf to put the public triangle at Weavers Wharf to some appropriate use.*

12.11 A letter be sent to within the District churches drawing their attention to the “Best kept churchyard scheme” and encouraging them to brighten up walls and the churchyards.

12.12 designated coach drop off point and coach parking facilities be available in Kidderminster town centre

12.13 The Council encourage proposals for hotel development in KTC3 to help provide budget accommodation in Kidderminster.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- ◆ Minutes from the Environment and Economic Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Panel on 12th October 2005.
- ◆ Minutes from the following Task and Finish Group meetings:
 - 19th December 2005
 - 31st August 2006
 - 27th September 2006
 - 6th December 2006
- ◆ Questionnaire responses from Bed and Breakfasts
- ◆ Responses from District Councils regarding floral displays

14. CONSULTEES

Steve Singleton, Economic Development & Tourism Manager
Maggie Booth, Tourism Officer
Councillor Mrs L Edginton, Mayor of Bewdley
Councillor M Partridge, Mayor of Stourport-on-Severn
Sue Hayden, Bewdley and District Twinning Association
Richard Perrin, Bewdley Town Centre Forum
Derek Fradgley, Stourport Town Centre Forum and Stourport Forward
Mr Peter Picken
Pershore Town Council
Bridgnorth Town Council
Bridgnorth District Council
Much Wenlock Town Council

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