

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

**SCRUTINY PANEL 2
CULTURE AND TOURISM**

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BRIEFING NOTE: SITE VISITS

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 At its December 2017 meeting, Scrutiny Panel 2 (Culture and Tourism) discussed potential site visits and decided that it would visit:

- Rugby and Market Harborough

1.2 Other towns and cities were suggested:

- Hull
- Stratford Upon Avon
- Leicester
- Hay on Wye

1.3 The findings from the desktop research regarding the other cities and towns listed above are detailed in a separate agenda item.

1.4 Councillor Jamie Lane (Chair); Councillor Sam Kilby-Shaw (Deputy Chair); Councillors Arthur McCutcheon, Mohammed Aziz, Vicky Culbard and Zoe Smith together with the Scrutiny Officer attended the site visits.

2 MARKET HARBOROUGH



2.1 The site visit met with the Tourism Executive of Leicestershire Promotions Limited. The Tourism Executive works four days for Harborough District Council, the Authority pays his salary.

2.2 A number of successful initiatives have been introduced including:

- Networking with the managers of local hotels, bed and breakfasts, attractions, cafes etc. Promotion of these is now via a micro site – “explore Harborough” that is contained within the full website “Go Leicestershire”. Explore Harborough is building a mini brand.
- Harborough by the sea
- Harborough Cultural Hub – Has a tri-annual programme. The Hub comprises around 7-8 performing arts associations. It is aimed that the Hub will become self-sufficient. Prior to the inception of the Hub, the arts associations had not come together before to share information.
- The Tourism Steering Group meets quarterly comprising around 35 members. Each meeting commences with ½ hour of networking then ½ hour of an update and strategising. It is very successful. The meetings are initiated by the Tourism Executive and the Group encourages tourism businesses to come together.
- There is a working document for Harborough that details what the key themes are in relation to promoting culture and heritage – A Tourism blue print. There are a lot of events in the town which include:

Farmers' Market
Arts Fresco (Street Art)

2.3 Key strengths in Harborough include Alcohol Producers and Performing Arts Associations. There is a need for different funding streams for tourism.

2.4 Harborough used to have a blue badge guide but now tend to be self-guided. There is a Tourism Strategy for the district. Blue plaques are in situ in the town.

2.5 A heritage guide (copy appended); has been produced and visitors can buy this for £1. A trail of the town has been put together. It is aimed to attract coaches into Market Harborough. There are two coach spaces at the indoor market, they drop off and then go off to the Leisure Centre to park. The driver is provided with a voucher for a meal in the indoor market. Visitors are then greeted by a volunteer from the Museum and showed around the museum and then a tour of the town. This initiative is proving to be very successful but only two coach spaces are available. Market Harborough is felt to be a ½ day experience. Work is in progress with the County Show Ground regarding dedicated parking.



- 2.6 An attractions map is about to go to print, which will include details of indoor activities, culture, family days out, places to stay etc. Harborough District Council has paid for this as a “thank you”. The map will be available free of charge. An app. “The Harborough Pass” is being developed. Work is also taking place with Visit England regarding the production of an itinerary.
- 2.7 Links can be made between business and the local town; this includes international businesses; for example, there are 24 visitors from China coming to Market Harborough in February. If this is successful, the initiative will continue.
- 2.8 Harborough has two groups, made of volunteers – Harborough in Bloom and a Litter Pickers Group – both highly successful. The Groups are subsidised by the Council.
- 2.9 A “test event” had taken place at Christmas at Foxton Locks. It had been free to attend and had been run by the Harborough Cultural Hub together with Foxton Locks. The event had included performing on the boats, such as short plays, music etc. There had been very good collaboration – Foxton Locks had been promoted, and the performers also. There is a need for an individual to get such events going and pull them together. The event was run for a second year and was organised by the Hub and Foxton Locks. Tickets were sold for the second event so that numbers could be managed following lessons learnt from year one.
- 2.10 The Canal and River Trust work with Union narrow boats and put on events, e.g., opening event at the new marina at North Kilworth.
- 2.11 An app. has been developed around the incline plain. Visitors stand at the bottom of the incline and visualise the old boat lift.
- 2.12 The town of Market Harborough is a sought after place for retailers, mainly independents, and empty shops do not stay empty for long. There is a vibrant Chamber of Commerce in Market Harborough. It is easy to park in Market Harborough.



2.13 Lutterworth comes within Harborough district. The town has a Retail Forum that is lobbying to raise the profile of Lutterworth. A leaflet – “The Lutterworth Shopper” which is given out locally and to schools etc with different offers from the local shops. Events are often held at a cost of £3 per visitor; often attracting around 200 people.

2.14 The site visit had a short guided tour of the town noting some of the key features.



3 RUGBY

3.1 The site visit headed off to Rugby. It met with the Arts, heritage and Visitor Services Manager and the Town Centre and Tourism Team Leader. The town has a team of Town Guides, all volunteers that had initially been introduced during the Rugby World cup in 2015. A new role has recently been established – Place Marketing Officer.

3.2 The town of Rugby attracts a lot of overseas visitors.

3.3 The site visit went to the museum and art gallery, both of which are free to visitors and also went along to Hall of Fame. Small admission charges for the Hall of Fame were introduced in 2017. The total integration of the library, museum and Hall of Fame works very well. There is a need for a diverse offer, but the way attractions and the town is marketed and promoted is key to bringing visitors in.

- 3.4 Plans are underway to increase the opportunity for the nighttime economy. Occasional evening events take place.
- 3.5 Free tours of the town are offered and these can be booked through the Visitor Centre. There is also a separate tour of Rugby School. The tours aim to create a sense of local society and what to be proud of in Rugby.



- 3.6 The Leader of Rugby Borough Council wanted schools in the town to know that Rugby football started in the town and there are links with schools in the borough (Key stage 1 and 2). The Authority has a part time Learning and Outreach Officer that develops the strategic programme programme and a part time Education Development Assistant that has a focus on schools and early years. The schools programme is an important part of the service's activity, linking the heritage and art of the town with the curriculum. There is a need for an Officer to drive such a programme. The museum has regular sessions such as parent and baby sessions and after school sessions. There is partnership working with the local Rugby College. Lots of "classes" are held in the education rooms. Volunteers also help across the education programme. Rugby Art Gallery and Museum is a Volunteer Maker Pioneer and has recently launched a website specifically for volunteers.
- 3.7 The site visit had sight of the current display in the art gallery and museum. There was a consultation board, for the public to add comments, regarding an HLF bid. The relationship with the Arts Council is important, they are an Accredited Museum, they are not regularly funded from the Arts Council, but receive Grants for the Arts support.



3.8 The Hall of Fame attracts lots of international visitors to the town.



3.9 The Authority reviewed its Corporate Strategy in 2017 and the visitor experience/Tourism was prioritised.

3.10 There is a good artist scene in Rugby.

3.11 The Site Visit was privileged to go on a short guided tour of the town. It was not the full tour but a number of key attractions were observed. A volunteer guide led the tour.



4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Both towns visited had a Tourism Strategy or similar.
- 4.2 Both towns have blue plaques, example of which above in paragraph 2.11.
- 4.3 Harborough has a heritage guide and costs £1. Rugby does too.
- 4.4 Both towns have organised tours, led by volunteers.
- 4.5 Harborough had engaged volunteers in a number of ways – Cultural Hub, Groups such as Bloom and Litter Picking.
- 4.6 Both towns attract lots of visitors.

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