

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

17 JANUARY 2006

FOURTH REVIEW OF LEISURE STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To survey the success of last year's action plan and propose one for 2006/7.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The City Council adopted its Leisure Strategy in 2001 and has reviewed the action plan, via this Committee, each year since. Each report presents last year's actions, with a commentary, and proposals for the following year.
- 2.2 The main strategy can be viewed on the Council's website. The strategy is part of a hierarchy of policy documents: above it are the Cultural Strategy and the Vision Strategy and below it the individual service plans for the 7 different services delivered by the unit (Leisure Facilities, River and Canal, Countryside, Children's Play, Sports Development, Marketing and Events and the Museum Service.)
- 2.3 This will be the last such review, as the strategy itself has a five year life. Leisure and Museums staff will be producing a new strategy in the course of 2006, to be presented to the Committee at this time next year.

3. REVIEW OF 2005/6

- 3.1 This year has been dominated by a small number of relatively big projects. The biggest of all has been and will continue to be the RAMM Development Project. The Heritage Lottery Fund announced that our bid had been successful in January this year, and we immediately moved forward to start work on the stage 2 bid, due in February 2006. It was necessary to appoint further consultants' firms to complement those who have been on the project from the start, and firms of project managers and services and structural engineers were appointed very quickly. Even with project managers on board the demand on the time of everyone associated with the project has been substantial. At the same we were also assembling a team to design the new museum store at Exton Road. Here in particular deadlines were crucial as the store must be ready before the main building closes.
- 3.2 Also in the museum sphere Renaissance in the Regions has continued to deliver great benefits to the service and to users, but with a new business plan to be prepared for years 4 and 5, and ever more staff to be appointed, it has been a struggle to keep ahead of the deadlines imposed at national level. Exeter has proved however to be one of the best at spending the money within these tight deadlines and at delivering real results from the money. Exeter was chosen for a visit by a team from the Treasury, the Department for Culture Media and Sport and the Museums Libraries and Archives Council, each checking on our outcomes for their objectives.

- 3.3 Finally in the museum we have been preparing a multi-funded scheme to bring St Nicholas Priory back into full use. An ECC capital bid is ensuring that the building is once again safe, water tight and energy efficient. Renaissance in the Regions is paying for the furnishings and other equipment necessary to re-create the Priory in its guise as a private house just as it was in 1600, while the Heritage Lottery Fund has just announced a grant of £50,000 to install the panelling from a house in the High Street which the museum bought in a San Francisco auction about four years ago. The finished product is now due to be ready in early 2007, in time to be the main public site of the museum during its closure for the main project. It will be an education site during the day, and open to the public at weekends and in holidays and by special arrangement on occasional evenings.
- 3.4 In Leisure the big time-absorbing projects have been the re-negotiation of the contract to manage the leisure centres, work to define what sort of leisure estate the city will require in the next decade and how it should be managed (the Leisure Facilities Review), and the development of a viable concept for a new harbour authority. The first is now complete, with a contract extension granted to DC Leisure Management timed to end as the Riverside contract finishes in 2010. The Leisure Facilities Review is also well under way, with the first phase, dealing with Pyramids, on this agenda. The harbour project has been particularly onerous, dealing as it does with ancient rights and privileges, acts of parliament going back to the 16th century, and more pertinently, substantial financial changes for many thousands of estuary users.
- 3.5 Community Outreach has continued to provide services throughout the city in the areas of marketing, physical activity, exhibitions and children's activities, with substantial success. The establishment of the in-house Active 4 Life scheme has been very rapid with widespread publicity and good take-up. A wide range of sporting and physical activity choices is now available to young people in the city, and the team is working closely with the recently set up network for physical activity in schools to ensure that the activities offered are complementary.
- 3.6 Several major projects have not taken place, nearly always because the necessary resources have not been available. The Canal Management Plan has not been completed: work on the Harbour Revision Order has taken precedence. The proposal to work with the Canoe Union to promote Exeter as a centre of excellence for the sport has not been implemented. This was the legacy of the aborted proposals to build a whitewater canoe facility. However no time has been available to undertake the significant work it would need, and the action plan suggests postponing further consideration until the new strategy is being prepared.
- 3.7 The Leisure and Museums Chartermark application was deferred while the Council considered whether to seek a corporate award. It seems likely that the new quality assurance system backed by Sport England and being investigated by the other cultural agencies – Towards An Excellent Service – might become a compulsory feature of the new Comprehensive Performance Assessment regime.
- 3.8 The most disappointing element of the year was the failure to engage Mowlem or Bryanston Square in any dialogue about community use of the new schools. There are clearly bigger issues around PFI project, but it is sad to note that Mowlem, having

agreed that the TUPE regulations applied to our joint use staff, persistently failed to communicate with them or us, so that our news mainly came from the local press. Longer term the city will also suffer from the failure to ensure that the real potential of the new schools to play a wider role in its cultural life was realised. The new regime will essentially be a commercial one, with few connections to other agencies such as ourselves. Over time this could change, but the initial momentum has been lost for now.

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 As mentioned above this will be the last review of this particular strategy. The major task for the Leisure and Museums team in the coming year will be the development of a new strategy, looking at how the council should respond to the cultural demands of the city over the next five years and beyond. We would propose bringing a context document to committee early on in the year, so that Members have the opportunity to discuss their priorities and ideas, before starting a consultation process.

5. RECOMMENDED

- 1) that the report be noted.

HEAD OF LEISURE AND MUSEUMS

H:LP/Committee/106SCC4
5 January 2006

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:

None