

EXETER CITY COUNCIL
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ECONOMY
11 MARCH 2010

UPDATE ON THE EXETER VISITOR/TOURISM STRATEGY 2007 - 2010

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on progress with implementation of the Exeter Visitor/Tourism Strategy 2007-2010.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Executive approved the Exeter Visitor/Tourism Strategy 2007-2010 on 13 March 2007 and implementation started from April 2007.
- 2.2 The aim of the Strategy is to:-
 “further develop the city as a nationally recognised visitor destination in a sustainable manner, focussing on Exeter's strengths as the regional capital as a leading, cultural, heritage and shopping destination, in providing jobs and supporting businesses. The intention is to increase tourism activity (visitor income) by 15% within the lifetime of the strategy”.
- 2.3 The focus of the Strategy is on encouraging more short- break, day visitors and groups to the city and the area, thus increasing the level of tourist spend within Exeter. The appeal of the city has been increased since the adoption of the strategy through the opening of Princesshay, the re-opening of St Nicholas Priory and Exeter's Underground Passages, and improvements to city centre pedestrian signage and the public realm. Developing the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, the Quay House Visitor Centre and the future development of the bus station site will further improve the appeal of the city to the short break, day visitor and group markets.
- 2.4 Actions from the Visitor/Tourism Strategy form part of the Tourism Unit's annual work programme and 'Service Improvement Plan'.
- 2.5 Tourism to the city was worth just over £165.5 million in 2007, which supports an estimated 4,000+ jobs, covering the sectors below. The information was gathered from the Cambridge Economic Activity model, which shows the volume and value of tourism to the city. The model is commissioned every 2 years; data for 2009 will be released mid 2010.

Type of spend (2007)	£ million
Accommodation	£26.3
Shopping	£46.6
Food & Drink	£44.4
Attractions & Entertainment	£16.8
Travel	£18.3
Visiting Friends & Relatives	£13.1
TOTAL	£165.5
Total estimated Jobs (supported by the above spend)	4,000+

3.0 PROGRESS TO DATE

3.1 The following four priorities were agreed in the Strategy to be implemented in partnership with the tourism business community in the city and the Exeter & Essential Devon Tourism Partnership. A benchmark set of indicators for measuring progress was set out and based on 2005 figures, as the latest available at the time of agreeing the strategy. A brief overview of outputs and progress during 2009 is listed below under each priority:

3.1.1 **Priority 1 - To build on Exeter's position as a year-round quality visitor destination** by developing in partnership a series of themed marketing campaigns to raise the profile of the city nationally, regionally and locally, aimed at increasing visitor numbers and spend.

Progress to date:

- new shopping website launched (www.exetershopping.org);
- enhanced promotional shopping campaign developed covering winter 2009;
- local company appointed to develop and implement a search engine optimisation campaign to increase unique website hits to www.exeterandessentialdevon.com;
- new Group Organisers Guide and booking form launched covering the Exeter & Essential Devon area, to promote Exeter as a place to visit for groups;
- reduce size of the Exeter & Essential Devon Visitor Guide from A4 to A5 to reduce postage costs. 100,000 copies were printed and distributed nationally and internationally. Savings were channelled into a wider promotional campaign for the area;
- participation in county wide journalist visits, ensuring Exeter is covered in all press articles covering Devon;
- St Nicholas Priory included in all heritage themed advertising undertaken by Tourism Unit, to provide the visitor with comprehensive information on heritage attractions to visit in Exeter;
- bi-monthly email-newsletter sent to visitors requesting information on Exeter & Essential Devon;
- all brochures and leaflets produced by the Tourism Unit available to download as PDF's from tourism websites, reducing postage costs;
- Exeter & Essential Devon Visitor Guide, Exeter & Essential Devon Group Organisers Guide, Exeter Mini Guide and Exeter Shopping & Parking Map all produced as digital guides and available to download from tourism websites.

Outputs to date:

- unique website hits to tourism website (www.exeterandessentialdevon.com) increase by 426%;
- increase of 5.5% in the amount of people who visit the city for a day and an increase in their expenditure by 11.6% (between 2005 and 2007);
- increase of 132% in the amount of people who visit the city to visit friends and relatives (between 2005 and 2007);
- total visitor related spend within the city increased by 3.7% (between 2005 and 2007).

3.1.2 Priority 2 - To raise the quality and competitiveness of the visitor experience in Exeter by developing and improving city attractions, events and visitor services.

Progress to date:

- Exeter's Underground Passages achieved Quality Assured Visitor Attraction award which is a quality assessment and management tool to help improve the service offered to customers;
- autumn promotional campaign developed and implemented to increase the amount of people who visit Exeter's Underground Passages during the winter months;
- Exeter Cathedral included within the group booking service, to improve the service offered to group organisers;
- Exeter Group Privilege Card re-introduced and distributed to group organisers;
- Exeter's green spaces included in the annual Exeter Mini Guide and tourism websites.

Outputs to date:

- an increase of 29% in people attending a Red Coat Guided tour (between 2005 and 2009)
- an increase of 6% in usage of the Quay House Visitor Centre (between 2005 and 2009)
- an increase of 19% in visitor numbers of Exeter's Underground Passages Exeter (between 2005 and 2009)
- an increase of 45% in group bookings made through Tourism Unit (between 2005 and 2009)
- a decrease of 9% in usage of Exeter Visitor Information & Tickets (between 2005 and 2009). This is primarily due to visitors sourcing their own information and booking accommodation pre-arrival via the internet, through mobile phones and other electronic devices.

3.1.3 Priority 3 - To maximise economic benefits and employment opportunities from tourism by strengthening the partnership with the business community and supporting improvements and additions to the accommodation stock.

Progress to date:

- Exeter & Essential Devon Tourism Partnership incorporated and registered at Companies House with the purpose of promoting the area for short breaks, long holidays and group visits;
- training programme developed and implemented in conjunction with the Devon Tourism Skills Network and South West Tourism;
- development and promotional work continues with Visit Devon - new website launched (www.visitdevon.co.uk) which includes listings of Exeter visitor facilities;
- new hotel stock promoted on tourism websites and included in press releases relating to investment within the city and new developments;
- build started on the Flybe Academy, which includes a hotel and training academy for pilots, cabin crew and ground crew;
- work continues on promoting Sky Park and Science Park as sites for further hotel development.

Outputs to date:

- 9% increase in membership of the Exeter & Essential Devon Tourism Partnership within the last 12 months, which allowed for greater marketing of the area nationally;
- 5% increase in employment supported by tourism spend within the city (between 2005 and 2007);
- 23 individuals took part in training courses run by Devon Tourism Skills Network and South West Tourism during 2009.

3.1.4 **Priority 4 - Improve the position of Exeter as a short break destination through sustainable tourism initiatives** by encouraging tourist facilities within Exeter to raise quality standards and to adopt a sustainable approach to tourism development.

Progress to date:

- themed car free days out itineraries available to download from tourism websites, covering shopping, walking, gardens and visiting historic sites within the Exeter & Essential Devon area to encourage visitors to travel around the area by public transport;
- Code of Practice developed for group related accommodation and attractions within Exeter & Essential Devon to ensure that groups receive readily available helpful information on pricing, access, special offers and receive an excellent welcome;
- information distributed to tourism businesses on the benefits of participating in the Green Tourism Business Scheme.

Outputs to date:

- 12 businesses achieve accreditation through the Green Tourism Business Scheme, a national sustainable tourism certification;
- email database increases by 285%, to 27,000 contacts, to enable us to communicate with our customers more cost effectively and to reduce paper based communications.

4.0 EXETER & ESSENTIAL DEVON TOURISM PARTNERSHIP

- 4.1 Realising the tourism potential of the city goes hand in hand with exploiting opportunities presented within Exeter and the wider area. The key is to have a concerted effort to minimise duplication, where possible, pool resources and maximise promotion through an integrated approach. Over the past three years the Tourism Unit has been working on developing the Exeter & Essential Devon Tourism Partnership, which broadly covers the areas of Exeter, East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge.
- 4.2 Articles of Association, a Memorandum of Association and a comprehensive business plan have been developed, and the company has been registered at Companies House (company number 4689320). Funders of the Tourism Partnership include Exeter City Council, Exeter & the Heart of Devon Hotels & Restaurants Association, Axe Valley Promotions, the Blackdown Hills Business Association and local tourism businesses through a membership fee.
- 4.3 Board meetings occur every two months and discuss current and future planned activities, along with joint projects to be undertaken with Visit Devon and other Tourism Partnerships within Devon. Work undertaken by the Tourism Partnership, current and planned, includes:
- website development and promotion (www.exeterandessentialdevon.com)

- business support activities
- work with Visit Devon on the promotion of Devon nationally and internationally
- press and public relations, and journalist visits
- distribution of postcard to targeted areas within the UK, with the aim of increasing email addresses
- national advertising of destination, visitor guide and website
- brochure production, distribution and fulfilment
- visitor and business e-newsletters
- attend national exhibitions to promote the area to the group and conference market
- development of themed promotional campaigns
- recruitment of tourism related businesses within the area to the membership scheme

4.4 As of January 2010, membership to the Tourism Partnership stands at 269, which covers mainly attractions and accommodation providers based within Exeter, East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge. A new membership scheme is being developed and will be launched by April 2010 and will offer benefits and services that are not offered by other agencies. It is intended to grow the membership base by 50% by recruiting additional accommodation providers and attractions as well as food & drink, transport and retail organisations.

5.0 CURRENT ECONOMIC CLIMATE

5.1 Initially, the economic downturn was predicted to have a positive effect on the domestic tourism market, but this has been slow to develop, especially within regional cities. There is still widespread concern about the economic downturn as most people/visitors have altered their spending patterns.

5.2 Headline information released by Visit Britain in January 2010 indicates nationally that:

- a) overseas (inbound) visits are down 8.8%, with spend down by 1.9% in the last 12 months to November 2009;
- b) domestic overnight trips have increased by 3.3%, with spend down by 1% in the last 12 months to November 2009.

5.3 From a survey completed in November 2009 by South West Tourism, respondents reported a decrease in visitor numbers when compared to the same month in 2008. Over 48% of respondents said that visitors were spending less and 41% stated that visitors were spending about the same.

5.4 From a recent survey completed by Visit Devon, tourism businesses are optimistic about the year ahead; headline facts included:

- a) 75% of businesses are reporting that forward bookings are the same or better than last year;
- b) 70% experienced an uplift in 2009 Christmas bookings;
- c) 20% of accommodation providers are full for Easter.

5.5 The economic climate and the fall of the pound against the euro have had a marked difference on people's buying decisions for their annual domestic and overseas holiday(s). However, as shown above, local and national research indicates that holidays are still a priority for UK adults.

5.6 The Exeter & Essential Devon Tourism Partnership will build on work already achieved during 2009, to promote the area as an affordable destination for

families and couples wanting a short break or longer holiday. To help with this, the 2009 Exeter & Essential Devon Visitor Guide has been advertised more widely with £25,000 already committed. The Tourism Unit work continuously on the tourism website (www.exeterandessentialdevon.com) to ensure that it appears on internet search engines, particularly for people searching for family holidays in the South West and Devon. It is planned to develop a national marketing campaign to promote the area to conference organisers and group organisers, to increase the amount of spend and people who visit the area.

Recession funding

5.7 The City Council allocated £35,000 mid 2009 to promote the area for a short break or long holiday to help businesses recover from the economic downturn. The following initiatives have been implemented to help increase the awareness of Exeter as a destination for a holiday:

- implement annual Search Engine Optimisation campaign to help increase website traffic to www.exeterandessentialdevon.com and www.exetershopping.org;
- invite travel journalists to visit to Exeter to enable them to write articles on how accessible the city is and what there is to see and do, targeting Flybe routes into Exeter and the national press;
- financial contribution to South West marketing campaigns, to enable Exeter and its surrounding area to be featured, including: Cities, Gourmet, Family and Rural marketing campaigns;
- install platform posters at key train stations to encourage people to visit Exeter by public transport for a short break holiday including Bath Spa, Bristol Temple Meads, Cardiff Central, Cardiff Queen Street, Newport, Gloucester, Newbury and Reading;
- distribute postcards within the above towns and cities and Flybe routes into Exeter, to promote Exeter as a short break holiday destination;
- develop a family marketing campaign promoting Exeter & Essential Devon for a week long holiday.

6.0 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

- 6.1 A set of key performance indicators were included in the Strategy as a basis for monitoring trends and the effectiveness of the actions, which are listed within Appendix 1. Figures for 2005 were taken as the baseline as the most recent information available at the time. This has been updated to include data for 2009.
- 6.2 Facilities managed by the Tourism Unit have seen a variation of increases and decreases from +24% to -9%. This has been attributed to changes in visitor booking patterns, the current economic climate and better promotion of a number of facilities.
- 6.3 The total number of people visiting Exeter Visitor Information & Tickets (EVIT) and the amount of accommodation bookings made through EVIT has fallen, in line with national trends. This is mainly the result of an increase in the usage of the internet and mobile phones, and people booking online before their visit to the area. The centre continues to be used by those wishing to visit the city, and once in the city, to receive information on what there is to see and do and make their stay as enjoyable and stress free as possible. The centre is also heavily used by residents of Exeter to gain information on events within the city, find information on where to take visiting family and friends; and to book theatre tickets through the Exeter Northcott Theatre booking desk.

- 6.4 The 'Cambridge Economic Impact Model' is commissioned every two years (by South West Tourism) to estimate the volume and value of tourism to the South West economy. Data is then extracted for the sub-regions, including Exeter. The model draws down data from the United Kingdom Tourism Survey for domestic visitors, the International Passenger Survey and the England Leisure Day Visits Survey. The 2009 survey is due to be released in autumn 2010.
- 6.5 From the most recent Cambridge Economic Impact Model (2007), which can be seen in Appendix 2, it is estimated that tourism is worth in the region of £165.5 million annually to the Exeter economy, an increase of 3.7% from 2005. Some 4,000+ jobs are supported within hotels, attractions, cultural venues, eating out venues and transport facilities within the city, an increase of 5.4%.
- 6.6 The main points arising from comparisons from 2005 to 2007 include:
- total actual jobs supported by tourism spend has increased by 5.4%;
 - spend from day visitors has increased by 11.6%;
 - spend from overnight stays has decreased by 5.1%;
 - visits to friends and relatives has increased by 132%;
 - the total amount of bed spaces within Exeter has increased by 11%;
 - total tourism spend has increased by 3.7%.
- 6.7 The Cambridge Economic Impact Model has to be treated with some caution, as for example it shows a drop in overnight trips and expenditure in 2007, which goes against information provided by the local industry. It is useful as an indicator of trends, but the absolute figures are the results of a model not comprehensive information.

7.0 PRIORITIES FOR 2010 - 11

- 7.1 Considerable capital investment has been made in the infrastructure of the city to increase the appeal of and to cater for visitors to the city. References have been made earlier in this report to investment in pedestrian signage throughout the city and the re-opening of upgraded facilities at St Nicholas Priory, the Underground Passages, EVIT and Princesshay.
- 7.2 The focus for 2010-11 will be on delivering outstanding actions from the Visitor/Tourism Strategy, developing the Exeter & Essential Devon Tourism Partnership and paying particular emphasis on the promotion of the city in light of the challenging national economic climate. These are again broken down into the four strategy priority areas as follows:
- 7.2.1 **To build on Exeter's position as a year-round quality visitor destination** by developing in partnership a series of themed marketing campaigns to raise the profile of the city nationally, regionally and locally, aimed at increasing visitor numbers and spend, as follows:
- re-design and re-launch www.exeterandessentialdevon.com and www.exetershopping.org taking account of customer feedback, improved technology introduced since its launch and to improve functionality;
 - through the Exeter & Essential Devon Tourism Partnership, increase the promotion of the area regionally and nationally through more advertising, increasing the frequency of the e-newsletter sent, wider distribution of the Visitor Guide,

increase in press releases issued and development of a family promotional campaign;

- work with Visit Devon to promote the area to the overseas market, primarily focusing on the development of web-based promotions, to include www.cornwall-devon.com (France, Germany and Netherlands), www.mysouthwestengland.com (USA) and www.suedwestengland.de (Germany). Not undertaken during 2009, due to changes within Visit Devon;
- review literature produced by Economy & Tourism Unit to reduce amount of guides produced and printed, to redirect revenue into effective web-based promotion;
- build on the success of previous Christmas promotional campaigns;
- further develop bird watching themed campaign promoting the area nationally for short breaks.

7.2.2 **Priority 2 - To raise the quality and competitiveness of the visitor experience in Exeter** by developing and improving city attractions, events and visitor services

- work with Leisure & Museums on the opening and promotion of RAMM;
- work with Devon County Council on developing and promoting the Exeter Tour Series cycle racing event;
- apply for the 'Quality Assured Visitor Attraction' award for the Quay House Visitor Centre, which is a management tool to help improve customer satisfaction;
- increase the promotion of the refurbished Quay House Visitor Centre
- promote the area to the conference market, including attending exhibitions, PR, direct mail and website development;
- review coverage and the effectiveness of brown tourist highway signs, in-conjunction with the relevant officer at Devon County Council;

7.2.3 **Priority 3 - To maximise economic benefits and employment opportunities from tourism** by strengthening the partnership with the business community and supporting improvements and additions to the accommodation stock.

- launch new membership scheme covering the Exeter & Essential Devon area to strengthen and improve engagement with the tourism industry, and to secure new members to increase marketing of the area;
- engage with a wider range of tourism business through the Exeter Tourism Forum, to develop new tourism projects within the city to improve the visitor offer;
- continue to work with the Economic Development Team on enquiries received on potential investment in new hotel developments.

7.2.4 **Priority 4 - Improve the position of Exeter as a short break destination through sustainable tourism initiatives** by encouraging tourist facilities within Exeter to raise quality standards and to adopt a sustainable approach to tourism development.

- enhance information already on tourism websites on how to visit and travel around the area by public transport;

- encourage businesses to take part in award schemes related to their sector (South West Tourism Excellence Awards, Taste of the West and the Federation of Small Businesses);
- work with Visit Devon on the introduction of the Devon Tourism Awards;
- improve the local accommodation inspection scheme, delivered by the Exeter & Essential Devon Tourism Partnership;
- work with Environmental Health to help tourism related businesses in producing 'Environmental Management Plans' covering all green issues.

7.3 The above actions will be delivered through the annual Tourism Unit budget and the resources of the Tourism Partnership, as shown below.

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Council involvement and contribution towards delivering the Exeter Visitor/Tourism Strategy has been met from within existing financial resources as summarised in the table below.

Tourism Unit Budget 2009-10	Net
Tourism Administration	£140,410
Tourism Marketing	£109,150
Exeter Visitor Information & Tickets	£176,410
Exeter's Underground Passages	£95,660
Quay House Visitor Centre (funded by ECQT)	£50,080
Red Coat Guides	£17,470
Exeter & Essential Devon Tourism Partnership	£80,000
Total	£669,180

8.2 The budget for the next year is generally as above less the proposed planned budget reductions covered by a separate report to this committee.

9.0 RECOMMENDED that:

9.1 Members note the progress made with implementing the 2007-2010 Exeter Visitor/Tourism Strategy and support the actions proposed to be undertaken during 2010/11.

RICHARD BALL
HEAD OF ECONOMY AND TOURISM

ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

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

1. Report to Scrutiny Committee - Economy 18 January 2007
2. Report to Scrutiny Committee - Economy 12 March 2009

APPENDIX 1

Tourism Performance Indicators

Tourism Performance Indicators related to the actions within the strategy	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	% + / - from 2005
Number of visitors to the Tourist Information Centre (EVIT)	87,955	72,899	74,800	106,234	79,618	-9%
Comment:	The fall in visitors to EVIT is due to a number of reasons, but particularly with visitors sourcing their own information, accommodation and tickets pre-arrival via the internet and the increased use of mobile phones and other devices.					
Number of accomm. bookings made in the Tourist Information Centre (EVIT)	758	648	615	428	413	-45%
Comment:	As above.					
Number of visitors on a Red Coat Guided Tour	12,912	14,617	18,114	17,204	16,125	24%
Comment:	The Red Coat Guides are dependant on good weather and due to us having a number of bad summers, figures have reduced over the past 2 years.					
Number of Visitors to the Quay House Visitor Centre	23,471	26,048	24,561	26,123	25,060	6%
Comment:	A new leaflet highlighted the Quayside and its attractions was produced, so boosted visitor figures during 2008, but due to continuous bad weather during 2009 visitors to the Quay dropped. Following refurbishment, currently underway, the centre will be promoted.					
Number of visitors to the Underground Passages	18,459	Closed	4,753	19,863	18,896	2%
Comment:	The centre was closed for just over two weeks during the main 6 weeks summer holidays during 2009 due to a burst water main and subsequent repairs to the passages, resulting in the loss of approx 2,000 visitors. Visitors to the Underground Passages were expected to rise by 10% during 2009.					
Number of visitors to the Royal Albert Memorial Museum	233,408	247,000	192,025	Closed	Closed	N/A
Comment:	Museum closed due to major refurbishment, due to open Spring 2011.					
Number of visitors to Exeter Cathedral	187,000	142,000	170,000	131,741	109,778	-41%
Comment:	2008 saw the introduction of an admission fee and the official counting of visitors; previous attendance was estimated.					
Unique visitors to city council website www.exeter.gov.uk/visiting	33,087	30,312	Not known	Not known	Not known	N/A
Comment:	No data is available due to the City Council website stats package contract ceasing early 2007.					

Unique visitors to Tourism Partnership website www.exeterandessentialdevon.com	24,107	28,596	40,508	42,258	134,206	456%
Comment:	The website is promoted on all promotional literature produced by the Tourism Unit, work is also undertaken to help improve the ranking within Google. This has resulted in a large increase in unique website hits.					
Total group bookings made through the Tourism Unit	334	363	445	500	486	45%
Comment:	Group bookings have increased due to increased promotion of the Tourism Unit's facilities through the group booking service.					

APPENDIX 2**Cambridge Economic Impact Model****Economic impact of tourism within Exeter**

	2005	2007	% + / -
Direct actual jobs	2,927	3,119	6.5%
Indirect actual jobs	923	940	1.8%
TOTAL ACTUAL jobs	3,850	4,059	5.4%
Day visits	1,494,000	1,576,000	5.5%
Day visitor expenditure	£67.8 million	£75.7 million	11.6%
Overnight trips	399,000	396,000	* - 0.7%
Overnight trips expenditure	£82.9 million	£78.6 million	* - 5.1%
Visits to friends & relatives	88,000	204,000	132%
Other tourism expenditure	£8.8 million	£11.2 million	27%
Bed spaces	5,881	6,539	11%
TOTAL TOURISM EXPENDITURE	£159.5 million	£165.5 million	3.7%

Source: South West Tourism

* Anecdotally, the local tourism accommodation providers do not concur with this negative figure in view of high levels of business activity at that time.