

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ECONOMY
Date of Meeting: 22 January 2014
Report of: Project Officer, Economy
Title: Filming in Exeter

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive. This report is for information only.

1. What is the report about?

1.1 To inform Members how the City Council responds on a day to day basis to film production companies wishing to film within the city, how the city is promoted as a good place to film and helping foster skills development in creative industries to support business growth and get local people into work.

1.2 The report details the benefits that filming can bring to an area and Exeter's recent track record in attracting filming.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 That Scrutiny Committee Economy notes the report and comments on the progress made by the Economy team in handling film enquiries and promoting the area as 'film friendly'.

2.2 To continue largely as before with film enquiries with officers taking advantage of changes in circumstances and opportunities as and when they arise.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 To inform members of the progress made as the amount spent in Exeter by film production companies has steadily grown in recent years and potential for this and secondary tourism benefits to increase further is recognised.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources:

4.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report. The handling of film enquiries is undertaken by a Project Officer within Economy.

5. Section 151 officer Comments

5.1 As per paragraph 4.1, there are no additional financial implications contained within this report.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 Clearly there will be issues to consider such as ensuring that sufficient public liability Insurance cover is held by the film production companies where filming is taking place on council owned land. Such issues will have to be dealt with on a case by case basis.

7. Monitoring officer Comments:

7.1 This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Economic benefits of filming in Exeter

8.1 There are two main benefits of filming to a city like Exeter:

- the amount spent by a film crew when they are on location
- the secondary tourism benefits when the programme or film is shown on TV or in the cinema

8.2 For large film crews - which typically comprise of 40 /50 members including directors, camera operatives, sound engineers, caterers, wardrobe assistants and actors - the amounts spent on location can be considerable. The average overnight spend per person for Exeter is approximately £270 which includes accommodation, food, drink and shopping. A 2-day film shoot with a large crew could easily spend up to £25,000 within a destination. Secondary tourism benefits can vastly surpass spending by a film crew. It is widely known that people want to visit places that they have seen on screen.

8.3 A film crew requires help and assistance when choosing a location to film in. Being classified as 'film friendly' could range from activities such as (quickly) offering suggestions about suitable film locations, providing suggestions about suitable accommodation and places to eat, helping organise a rolling road closure and providing a wide range of location contacts. When a new film enquiry is received, Exeter City Council always asks for proof that they have a minimum of £5m Public Liability Insurance. This removes any legal liability to the council where filming takes place on City Council owned land.

8.4 The table below details the number of enquiries handled by the Economy Project Officer and the subsequent spend. During 2003 and 2008 FFP Media were located in Exeter, so income to the city greatly increased. These figures exclude the consequent secondary spend which has been significant in some areas.

Year	Number of film enquiries handled	Amount spent by production companies in Exeter
2003	16	£512,000
2004	40	£ 42,900
2005	31	£ 28,600
2006	29	£ 32,400
2007	35	£ 55,300
2008	36	£275,000
2009	28	£ 31,000
2010/2011	20	£ 22,300
2011/2012	36	£ 37,500
2012/2013	56	£ 49,800
2013/2014	41	£ 63,000
2014/2015 (to date)	35	£ 55,300

*Whilst many figures are based on information received from film production companies, some are estimates so all figures in this report should be treated as approximate.

- 8.5 By and large the UK's film industry is based in London although the Isle of Man is attractive due to film tax breaks. Production companies will however venture further afield e.g. to Cornwall for coastal dramas like Doc Martin and the West Country for 'bonnet dramas' (historical productions like Lark Rise to Candleford) and to stately homes and script-specific locations throughout the country. There are also programmes, often 'daytime television' or 'reality TV' programmes that roam around the country such as Antiques Road Trip and Come Dine with Me, which Exeter has featured on many occasions.
- 8.6 For the majority of film enquiries, Exeter is disadvantaged by its location. As a consequence, Exeter sees few large film production companies although The Antiques Roadshow filmed on the Cathedral Green in 2013 and scenes from Broadchurch filmed in the University Of Exeter's Forum building in 2014, were both notable exceptions.
- 8.7 However, in the late 1990s a German film company FFP Media started to film television dramas based on the books of West Country author Rosamunde Pilcher, shown in Germany and Austria. Such has been the enduring success of these family television dramas that they still attract a viewing audience of around 9 million in each of these countries today.
- 8.8 FFP Media based themselves in Exeter in 2003 and 2008 and continue to film locally, having also been based in Poole, Plymouth and most recently in Newquay. Differing levels of total benefits in 8.4 reflect the amount that these productions brought to the city and the surrounding area, resulting in a total of approximately £512,000 in 2003 compared to £31,000 in 2009.
- 8.9 Secondary benefits of FFP Media filming continue to grow as there are now at least three German tour companies who bring visitors to the area, Exeter has benefitted hugely from this. The city is a good starting point for these tours and all the city hoteliers (and also those within the wider Heart of Devon area) will testify that the influx of German and Austrian tourists has been unbelievably good for their business. One city centre hotel valued visitors coming on Rosamunde Pilcher tours at £90,000 to £100,000 in 2012.
- 8.10 Other visitors wishing to see the area that they first saw on screen will arrive independently so a conservative estimate of these current secondary benefits would be in the region of £300,000 pa. FFP Media have now sold the dramas to Scandinavian countries. We can expect to see film visitors coming from these countries in the future.

9. Recent Success Stories

- 9.1 The UK television drama starring David Tennant, Broadchurch, was a huge success in 2013 and its main location West Bay in Dorset saw phenomenal secondary benefits.
- 9.2 As a result of Exeter City Council's Economy Project Officer informing Creative England of the huge changes to the University of Exeter campus, the Forum building appeared on their promotional website and was picked up by the location manager of Broadchurch. It was used as the film location of Exeter Courts in series two of Broadchurch which will be shown on ITV in January 2015. Exeter will receive substantial press coverage of Broadchurch filming on the University campus.

10. How can Exeter attract more film production companies

- 10.1 One of the Projects Officers within Exeter City Council's Economy Department provides a film location and permissions service on a reactive basis liaising with Devon County Council's Highways Department and other bodies as and when required. The Projects Officer acts as Exeter's representative on the Creative England SW's Local Authority Group having undertaken their training in being 'film friendly'. They also maintain an information service about Exeter and responds to national location requests from Creative England. It is recommended that this work continues as the benefits far exceed the costs.
- 10.2 In contrast, other local authorities such as Bristol and Weymouth have Film Offices with dedicated teams. Whilst this would inevitably bring more filming to the Exeter area, it would be costly with no guarantees of success.
- 10.3 The Project Officer is currently investigating options for a one-off project to be carried out by an intern, to improve Exeter's presence on national film websites and to develop a film pack on the city. In particular, Creative England SW promotes an image library to which location managers have free access. They need high quality images of buildings and open spaces especially for locations about which they have been previously unaware. Developing a film location image library will also be part of the project. There would be no cost to the City Council for the intern, just limited costs to develop the image library and film pack on the city.
- 10.4 Nationally, Creative England is lobbying for a change of law to enable filming to be an approved reason for a full road closure which is not currently the case. This will make it easier for film production companies to undertake large scale filming in places like Exeter.

11. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

- 11.1 Exeter's film support service contributes to 'Building a stronger sustainable city' and the main purpose of 'Help me run a successful business in Exeter' in promoting the city as a great place to do business and supporting the local economy.

12. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

- 12.1 Limited risk arising from this activity.

13. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults; economy; safety and the environment?

- 13.1 Support is provided to members of the film industry free of charge regardless of race, age, gender or orientation. The potential impact on the economy could be significant.

14. Are there any other options?

- 14.1 The three options are to continue the current level of support, to cease this activity or to increase levels of activity in order to attract more filming.

- 14.2 Ceasing the activity is not a recommended option as current support is largely reactive and location managers and film makers will always approach Exeter City Council for help. Significantly increasing levels of activity is not currently an option due to budget constraints and available staff resources. However, as suggested above, good use of a University of Exeter intern could make a beneficial difference.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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