

**EXETER CITY COUNCIL**  
**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ECONOMY**  
**22 JANUARY 2009**

**HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2008**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To report on the City Council's involvement in and the performance of the Heritage Open Days event in Exeter.
- 1.2 To seek support for a similar event in 2009 as part of the overall promotion of Exeter's heritage attractions.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Heritage Open Days is a national event co-ordinated by the Civic Trust on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, to celebrate England's heritage and history. Established in 1994 as England's contribution to European Heritage Days, the aim of the event is to offer free access to historical sites and sites of architectural interest. In Exeter the Council has extended the event to provide the opportunity to visit buildings not normally available to the public.
- 2.2 This is the ninth year that the City Council's Economy and Tourism Unit has co-ordinated Exeter's participation in Heritage Open Days. In 2008 the event took place between 11 and 14 September and included the following special openings, talks and tours:

Topsham Museum	Bill Douglas Centre
The X-Centre	Exeter Cathedral Library
Walk with the Writers Red Coat Tour	Spacex Gallery
Pynes Water Treatment Works	Barnfield Theatre
Grandisson Chapel	Devon Record Office
Exeter's Underground Passages	Southernhay United Reformed Church
Cathedral Roof Tour	Parish of Central Exeter
Tuckers Hall	21 The Mint
Exeter Civic Society Walk	Oakwood House & MRF
Devon & Exeter Institution	A Walk in the Park Red Coat Guided Tour
Topsham Pubs Past & Present	Exeter City FC
Sidwell Street Methodist Church	Met Office
St. Michael & All Angels Church	Cricklepit Mill
Ghost, Murder & Catacomb Red Coat Guided Tour	St. Nicholas Priory
Exeter Guildhall	Exeter Synagogue
Custom House	St. Mary Steps Church
Echoes of Exeter Red Coat Guided Tour	Poltimore House

- 2.3 Heritage Open Days is an opportunity for Exeter to capitalise on the growing popularity of heritage and to secure additional tourism business. Supporting this event plays on Exeter's strengths as a cultural and heritage destination. It also meets the following strategic objectives of
- maximising the economic benefits to the local Exeter economy by encouraging the sustainable development of tourism.
  - enhancing the quality of life for residents through the provision of improved and additional heritage , leisure, cultural and activity-based attractions and services.
  - enhancing the quality of the visitor experience in Exeter.
  - raising the profile of Exeter.
  - promoting the city's heritage attractions and the need to provide additional events to attract additional staying and day visitors year round.

### 3. PERFORMANCE AND EVALUATION

- 3.1 This year's event was very successful attracting a record number of visitors. This year there were a total of 4298 visits compared to previously highest recorded figure of 3319 visits in 2006. This equates to a 30% increase in visits compared to 2006's event.
- 3.2 The reasons for this increase are:
- 34 properties/events took part compared to 29 in 2007.
  - a greater number of high profile properties were involved this year, the recently refurbished St. Nicholas Priory, The Met Office, Exeter's Underground Passages, the Custom House and Exeter Cathedral.
  - in order to maintain a sense of 'freshness' of the event a number of new properties and properties that have not been involved for a a number of years participated. These included the Custom House, Exeter City Football Club, Tuckers Hall , St. Nicholas Priory, Topsham Museum and Southernhay United Reformed Church.
  - a focussed marketing campaign that included:
    - distributing 7,000 colour leaflets, with an improved visual impact during August 2008 to Tourist Information Centres and Libraries throughout Devon, to the venues and to members of the public who had requested the leaflet via [www.exeter.gov.uk](http://www.exeter.gov.uk).
    - securing a very high profile in the Civic Trust's on-line South West regional directory - Exeter was third only to Bristol and Gloucester in the size and profile of the event.
    - features on local radio.
    - coverage of events in the National Press
    - coverage in the Express and Echo
    - listing the event on various websites including [www.exeter.gov.uk](http://www.exeter.gov.uk), [www.exeterandessentialdevon.com](http://www.exeterandessentialdevon.com), [www.visitdevon.co.uk](http://www.visitdevon.co.uk) and [www.enjoyengland.com](http://www.enjoyengland.com)
- 3.3 A questionnaire was given to attendees to evaluate the event; 253 questionnaires were returned. Key points arising from the questionnaires are:
- 98% thought the event they had attended was excellent / good
  - 90% thought the scope of this year's event was excellent/good
  - 74% of people enjoyed more than one event throughout the weekend
  - people found out about the event through a number of different sources: leaflet (38%), local press (15%), Tourist Information Centre (19%), other (9%), website (11%), national press (4%), on site (4%)

- people who attended the event were either Exeter residents (48%) , lived in East Devon, Mid Devon or Teignbridge (29%), lived elsewhere in Devon (8%), or lived outside Devon (9%)
- 3.4 The event is now well established on the calendar within Exeter with both visitors and property owners. The event is very important in raising the profile of many of the smaller properties that do not have the resources to promote themselves to a wider audience.
- 3.5 Feedback from property owners and site managers is unanimous that the event is worthwhile and that they would like to be involved in Heritage Open Days in the future. The success of the event is due to the many volunteers throughout the city who give their time to organise and run events.
- 3.6 Due to the nature of many of the properties numbers are required to be restricted due to health and safety and security reasons. This obviously puts a cap on the attendance to many of the venues that in some instances could fill their events several times over.

#### **4. PROPOSAL**

- 4.1 The Economy and Tourism Unit is proposing to co-ordinate a similar event, which will take place between 10 - 13 September 2009.
- 4.2 Based on visitor feedback and the success in attracting a greater number of higher profile properties, it is proposed that additional opportunities will be explored for next year's event. It is proposed to explore the possibility of properties such as the new Court House, Rougemont Castle, the new rugby stadium at Sandy Park, Exeter Northcott, the Bishops Palace and Bowhill House to be involved in Heritage Open Days 2009.

#### **5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The cost of organising, marketing and co-ordinating the event was met from the 2008/09 Economy and Tourism budget, a total of £700 was spent on a promotional leaflet, the remaining costs being staff time.

#### **6. RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 Members to note the success of Exeter Heritage Open Days in 2008, and to support a similar event in 2009 as part of the overall promotion of Exeter's heritage attractions.

**RICHARD BALL**  
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#### **ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE**

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None.