

Tourism in historic towns - a quality offer

Morecambe

18 and 19 June 2008

The windswept town of Morecambe was an apt location for an event which explored the regeneration of resorts and the revitalisation of tourism in general. Despite the 'teething troubles' experienced, the restored Midland Hotel should prove to be a major asset to the town, which has already invested heavily in regeneration – in particular the public realm along the seafront, which delegates were guided round by Blue Badge Guides and Local Authority officers during the event.



The restored Midland Hotel, Morecambe

Richard Simmons, Chief Executive of CABE talked to delegates about the £45m he had 'in his back pocket' to spend on resort regeneration and, with the help of his old holiday snaps, looked at the factors which had affected the cultural change which in turn had brought about the decline in English resorts with a knock on effect for tourism as a whole.

The aim of 'Sea Change' is to use culture to make a difference to seaside resorts, contributing to sustainable, social and economic regeneration, with a focus on most deprived communities. It should be seen in the context of:

- Communities and Local Government Coastal Towns Initiative
- Regional economic strategies – soon to be Single Regional Strategies
- Local Area Agreements

The initiative will work in partnership with:

- Arts Council England
- BIG Lottery Fund
- CABE
- English Heritage
- Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
- 7 Regional Development Agencies

For full details refer to www.cabe.org.uk/seachange or for advice email seachange@cabe.org.uk



The restored Midland Hotel, Morecambe

Kurt Jansen, of the Tourism Alliance, followed with information about measuring the economic impact of tourism. He said that tourism generates £86.5bn per annum; but also had added benefits:

- Over 40% of expenditure is on "non-tourism" products and services
- Employs the second largest proportion of people qualified to NVQ level 2
- Significant employer of disabled people
- Fastest growing area of employment for 25-34 year olds

However, tourism is not a statutory requirement at either the local or regional level. He went on to look at the purpose of measuring the economic impact of tourism which helped in setting targets, monitoring activities, evaluating and comparing results.

Peter Marsden, Head of World Heritage at DCMS, began by explaining 'what is World Heritage', how things work, the need to review the UK Tentative List and the costs and benefits of World Heritage Site Status. The World Heritage list currently consists of 851 sites worldwide, and is the responsibility of the international community as a whole as it is exceptional in its universal application and a legacy for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

He explained the nomination process and the pressure on the UK Tentative List. In order to carry out a Cost/Benefit Study we need to know the costs involved in nomination process, the associated costs and responsibilities, the effect of location, the nature of the site and pre/post inscription marketing as well as how to reduce costs / optimise potential benefits of WHS bids and the potential to lever other sources of funding. A review was undertaken by Price Waterhouse Coopers who developed a cost/benefit framework. From this we can conclude that there are

advantages:

- Benign effect on management and protection
- Prestige and increased recognition
- Public Awareness and local pride
- More weight lent to conservation
- Possible increased access to funding

and disadvantages:

- Cost of bidding process
- Commitment – managing local expectations
- No automatic benefits in terms of regeneration or tourism
- Any additional funding from public sources can 'rob Peter to pay Paul'
- Scale, height and quality of development may come under close scrutiny
- Workload and costs on those who manage the site.



Stonehenge has World Heritage Site Status

In conclusion Peter said that the route to World Heritage status is not an easy one; it is a long process with no guarantee of success as there is extreme competition to get onto the World Heritage List. Many unique places of national or even international importance will never become World Heritage Sites. It is therefore necessary to establish clearly, at the outset, the outstanding universal value. The process is expensive and costs are rising, therefore we may need to consider whether objectives could be met in different ways and aspiring sites and bid partnerships need to weigh up very carefully whether WHS status is the right goal for them.

Stuart Barrow of VisitBritain, talked about "quality and quirkiness"; he suggested questions which must be asked: - Who are your visitors? How many do you have? How many can you support? What is your target market? And finally – Who would visit a town like this? There are as many different types of visitors as there are things that they seek.

Uniform national standards are vital to marketing – beach quality (Blue Flag), parks (Green Flag), NQAS Quality Rose etc but it is also vital to emphasise your USPs and PoDs (Point of Difference) and, for the experience you offer, your

ESP – Emotional Selling Point.

With regard to international marketing Stuart considered that working with non-tourism partners provides us with opportunities to raise Britain's profile and increase regional spread. For example "film has an incredible effect in creating impressions of a destination. Research shows us that

40% of potential visitors would be "very likely" to visit places from films or TV in Britain. VisitBritain delivered a targeted Harry Potter campaign in 22 overseas markets. In the US, 70% of those travelling to the UK commented that the Harry Potter film information VisitBritain had provided had encouraged them to stay longer and go to more parts of Britain. These figures were validated by attractions featuring in the film – Gloucester Cathedral and Alnwick Castle which both featured as Hogwarts School - which saw up to 20% increases in visitors."



Brief Encounter - or long term affair

A new approach has included the England Lifestyle Campaigns and a move to "make the most of what you've got" - festivals, local produce, local heroes, proven markets, cheese-rolling, mud flat racing, Santa run - Quirky is good! but works best when backed up with 'authenticity'. In a global market people can go anywhere in the world, he said, so give them something like nothing else on Earth!

Research shows that choices are influenced by:

- Previous experience (63%)
- Advice from friends and relatives (61%)
- Internet (48%)

It also shows that the following activities have high importance and a relatively high impact on retention:

- Welcoming & friendly people – rated below average
- Customer Service – rated below average
- Good quality accommodation – rated average
- Availability of good restaurants & fine dining – rated below average
- Local food and produce – rated below average
- Wide choice of food from diff cultures – rated average
- Unspoilt countryside – rated average

Phil Reddy of North West Development Agency began by asking "Do we have, or get the quality of place we deserve? Or that we need, given the increasingly competitive tourism environment in which we operate?"

The UK is no. 6 in the world in attracting inbound visitors And no. 2 in the world in generating outbound visitors The Agency believes that tourism and the visitor economy are important to the overall economy; and tourism is about people and the visitor economy is about place.



Animating the Public Realm

Over 50% of all tourism expenditure is by same day tourists; there are more than 200 million such visits to the NW region each year, which is around £5 billion per year which supports close to 200,000 jobs. The aim is to generate more value from tourism; that means more expenditure, and probably, more tourists. However, successful destinations are likely to be successful places for other sections of the economy too; this is an agenda that is of increasing importance to all.

Seeking answers to "Why aren't our towns and cities better places, and better destinations?" Phil focussed on the public (and semi-public) realm, and more broadly on the conditions for growth. He suggested that factors might include:

- A lack of competitive awareness
- A lack of knowledge about consumers and how we might attract them.
- Poor design standards
- Low quality or lack of management of place
- Little or no animation of place
- Issues of leadership and of coordination and cross departmental teamwork
- A tactical, rather than a strategically driven approach
- Not enough partnership with the private sector

He said that the aim of the Agency was to increase competitive awareness, which was linked to knowledge of what consumers are seeking, which would inform decisions on the retail, cultural and other experiential components that drive consumer choice. Experian and Locum have been commissioned to develop and test a place comparison methodology which will produce analytical reports combining information about existing and potential visitors and the appeal of the pilot areas to these.

The aim is to:

- Establish a common vision of the type of customer that the neighbourhood is trying to attract and the character of the activity it wishes to develop in order to attract them
- Establish a 'brand' for the neighbourhood and take actions to create a sense of place linked to this
- Develop a partnership of like-minded stakeholders within the neighbourhood that can take forward the vision
- Develop a plan to improve the neighbourhood as a destination
- Identify and promote anchor developments that will attract people.

The research has already made significant findings and Phil considered it to be the early stages of a fascinating and hopefully fruitful journey.

The Chair invited questions which stimulated discussion on:

- the impact of tourism on residents which needed to be managed, with enhanced facilities which benefited residents as well as visitors
- the role of the coaching industry
- the importance of strong leadership
- embracing the changes in tourism
- the importance of 'place'.



Facilities for young children - Average age of visitor now below 50

After lunch **Cllr Keith Budden** welcomed delegates on behalf of the City Council and opened the afternoon session.

Jim Trotman & Andrew Dobson, of Lancaster City Council explained the changes which had taken place in the town in order to improve its economic and social well being. These had resulted in:

- Control over physical realm and key buildings.
- Changing perceptions about the resort.
- Dealing with new uses filling the void.
- Confidence in the business sector to respond to change.
- A common vision.

The achievements so far included:

- Quality sea defence work.
- Award winning TERN project.
- The Eric Morecambe statue.
- THI 1.
- New retail and leisure investment.
- Priority status in strategic policy guidance.
- Restoration of the Midland Hotel

So, they asked, what has held us back? Factors identified included:

- Slow response from business community
- Lack of confidence at local level.
- Poor transport access.
- Resort still experiences social problems.
- National perception remains poor.

But there is light on the horizon with the emergence of the Morecambe Action Plan, the West End Master Plan, the M6/Heysham Link and the link with Cumbria in RSS.

The key tasks ahead were outlined and there was optimism that external investment was building, local views appear less rigid and the City Council commitment remains high. In conclusion, it was also important that the town, and its aspirations for tourism, were seen within the wider setting of the natural and cultural heritage.



Natural and cultural heritage

Peter Middleton, of L&R Consulting Solutions talked about seven community led heritage regeneration projects and some of the lessons that can be learned from them:

- The Winter Gardens, Morecambe
- Gorton Monastery, Manchester
- Murrays' Mills, Manchester
- The Florence Institute, Liverpool
- Victoria Baths, Manchester
- The Carpet Museum Trust, Kidderminster
- Seven Stories, Newcastle upon Tyne

The Winter Gardens in Morecambe had at one time played a significant part in the town's attraction for residents and visitors, but changes to leisure and visitor behaviour had brought about its demise. A 20 year campaign to restore the building had struggled to identify a productive use for it in a difficult market. With a large interior space it could have a range of uses and activities.

He talked about the importance of the people and communities involved, which includes project champions, 'significant others', mentors, facilitators and brokers, community leaders and fixers and political endorsement.

The range of organisations involved throughout the evolution of projects, and the relationships these engender were very significant, as is the influence of other stakeholders. The project itself is an opportunity for activities and learning. Peter talked about the potential sources of capital funding which could be explored and the need to ensure sustainability at all stages of the process.

In conclusion, he said that tourism and the visitor economy contributes to added value markets, to the distinctiveness of places and both lively ingredients and quality facilities to venues. And finally, he "saluted the champions" who drive projects from the initial idea through to fruition.

(Images of all of these schemes, and all the other presentations, can be seen by going to the reports page on www.ehtf.org.uk)



The Winter Gardens in Morecambe

Delegates were then guided on walking tours to illustrate the local case studies and returned for discussions with the speakers, before Chair, Brian Human, made some concluding remarks:

- the importance of the role of Champions for projects, and the development of partnership as well as the need for facilitators and enablers, which helped to develop capacity;
- the hard costs and soft benefits which needed to be considered in the decision making process;
- high quality in all aspects must be the goal;
- celebrate the extra-ordinary – treasure what you have and share it;
- places are for people, whether they are residents or visitors.

He thanked everyone who had contributed to the conference, especially NWDA for their support and Lancaster City Council for their invitation.

Speakers' power point presentations are available to EHTF Members in the Members' section of the EHTF website. For non-Members a cd compilation can be obtained for a small fee (£10). Visit www.ehtf.org.uk, call 0117 975 0459 or email ehhf@uwe.ac.uk.



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