

TELFORD AND WREKIN CO-OPERATIVE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE IMAGE OF TELFORD AND WREKIN COMMISSION SUB GROUP

2 MARCH 2012

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the work of the Co-operative Commission sub group on the Image of Telford and Wrekin and to set out the proposed recommendations to be considered by the Co-operative Commission Assembly.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Council, partners and community work together in new (co-operative) ways to enable **Telford to become a Conference Town**
- 2.2 That Telford & Wrekin Council promotes itself as a 'Business winning Council' (link to the Employment, Skills and Economy Commission sub group recommendations and actions)
- 2.3 That the 'joined up' Tourism Offer in Telford and Wrekin should be improved together with the co-ordination of marketing, PR and visitor information across Telford and Wrekin
- 2.4 That Council, partners and the community build on existing events and festivals to exploit and promote the assets of Telford and Wrekin, leading to a culturally vibrant place to live, work and visit.
- 2.5 That Council, partners and the community should work together to promote Civic Pride for residents of Telford and Wrekin
- 2.6 That the Co-operative Commission Assembly/Cabinet agrees the actions proposed in Section 3 of this report and that timescales and responsibilities for delivering the actions are agreed as next steps
- 2.7 That the Co-operative Commission/Council considers ways in which impact of the proposed actions is monitored and evaluated.

3.0 INFORMATION

3.1 **Improving the Image of Telford and Wrekin**

'A good place to visit and a good place to live'

Every action which supports the Image and visitor economy per se, adds value to Telford and Wrekin's quality of life for residents and businesses and to inward investment prospects. An attractive and compelling offer, high quality public realm, transport which works and places which are authentic, individual and distinctive will create success for all' (A Draft Plan for Growth for Tourism and the Visitor Economy in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford)

To genuinely improve the image of Telford and Wrekin, the group felt that we need to develop a joined up offer that celebrates the borough as a place that people and businesses want to live, work, visit and invest in and as an internationally important tourism destination.

The Co-operative Council Commission meeting held on 16th September identified the Image of Telford and Wrekin as a theme for one of its working groups along with some of the issues the group should consider including:

- Attracting inward investment
- Attracting visitors
- Attracting people to live, work and stay in the borough
- Identifying what is the unique selling point/proposition for Telford and Wrekin
- 'Branding' Telford and Wrekin
- Maximising opportunities through a 'joined up' approach
- Promoting Civic Pride

3.2 **Developing Key Areas of Focus**

The Image of Telford and Wrekin sub-group comprised of representatives of partner organisations, the community and the council. The full list of group members is attached in Appendix 1.

In order to identify the key areas of focus and agreed outcomes, the group considered a range of information including existing good practice, direct experience from the organisations represented and research relating to image, culture, tourism, events and economy. This information along with the direct experience of the group members was used to form the key areas of focus for the group, which the recommendations and actions focus on delivering:

- Increasing visitors to Telford and Wrekin (Business and Leisure Tourism)
- Increasing business investment in Telford and Wrekin
- Improving Civic Pride for residents of Telford and Wrekin

The Co-operative Council Community Forum meeting on 15th December held a workshop to look at issues relating to the Image of Telford and Wrekin. A member of the Commission sub-group attended this session, and the feedback from the workshop was used to develop the final recommendations.

3.3 **Rationale for Key Areas of Focus, Recommendations and Supporting Actions**

The agreed overarching vision of the group:

Improving the Image of Telford and Wrekin, to enable the borough to be 'A good place to live and therefore a good place to visit'.

The key recommendations and proposed supporting actions have been developed as follows in order to support achieving this vision.

3.3.1 **Recommendation 1: Telford to become a Conference Town**

Desired Impact:

- Positive impact on the Image of Telford and Wrekin for residents and visitors
- Return visits
- Inward investment
- Improved Civic Pride
- Reduction in crime and antisocial behaviour
- Good night time economy
- Employment opportunities for local people

Outputs and Requirements:

- Good and welcoming signage
- Seamless transport
- Clean streets
- Free Wifi
- Free car parking at hotels
- Improved service culture across all related sectors and excellent customer service
- Knowledgeable taxi drivers and clean taxis

The group acknowledged the evidence set out below regarding the 'value' of the events industry (Meetings and Events Manifesto for Britain) and also recognised that new investment in the sector is substantial, including Telford's Convention Quarter development - £250 million. The group feel that the time is right now with the Southwater development to acknowledge our good foundations and unite:

- Britain's event industry is worth almost £25 billion to the economy.
- The sector employs over 530,000 people in Britain and can increase employment numbers rapidly as the number of events expands without capital investment.
- The sector provides skilled employment to a diverse workforce nationally and provides an opportunity to nurture and develop creative, logistical and marketing talent.
- The Meetings and events sector is vital to over 25,000 small businesses and supports hotels, attractions, transport companies, florists, caterers, retailers, etc.
- Meetings and events contribute to infrastructure development on a national, regional and local level from both the public and private sectors.
- Events help develop diversity in our local culture and heritage providing opportunities for further destination expansion and growth.
- Meetings and events have a positive social impact on society, contributing to health and wellbeing, education, social diversity, community spirit and civic pride.
- Business visitors spend on average £131 per day – 72% more than the amount spent by leisure visitors on a daily basis, while visitors to UK exhibitions from overseas spend 193% more per day than leisure visitors.

The group felt that we have already developed a good product and have many assets, but need the Council to 'knit' the existing high quality elements together and maximise investments. We have the Southwater development and The International Centre, Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage site, central location within the UK, excellent transport infrastructure, Town Park (and HLF funded improvements), proposed investment in the Ice Rink, Sustainable Transport Fund and TCAT/University of Wolverhampton/New College.

Recommended Supporting Actions

- Agree a partnership approach to take forward this longer term vision, medium term actions and shorter term 'quick fixes'. Partners to include – hotels, businesses, Southwater, Telford International Centre, Council, Colleges and the Community.
- Ensure consistent messages across the council and stakeholders about the destination.
- Improve 'gateways' to and within the Borough:
 - Improve signage to and within the Borough - effective road signposting
 - Further explore the sponsorship opportunities of signage by local companies (e.g. 'home of The International Centre' – acknowledging our important partners)
 - Improve the Image on arrival in Telford from rail and car - something iconic – announcing you have arrived in Telford
 - Install welcome signage
 - Particular focus on the Town Centre when arriving by rail

- Make better use of the billboards at the rail station
- Develop a more integrated approach to transport
- Support a direct train service from London to Telford and link road to the M6/M54
- Review opportunities for use of the M54 service station to promote Telford and Wrekin
- Improve the 'hotel' offer
- Explore the opportunities for training taxi drivers to become local ambassadors

3.3.2 **Recommendation 2: Telford and Wrekin Council promotes itself as a 'Business Winning Council'**

(Link to Employment, Skills and Economy Commission sub group)

Desired Impact:

- Attracting new businesses into the borough
- Economic growth
- Telford to be promoted and known as an area to do business at a national level

To support the objectives of both inward investment and supporting existing businesses the borough's 'unique selling point/proposition' was recognised to be at the core of this approach. This is a combination of things however in order for this to be effective it was considered that a more targeted approach might be beneficial. The group felt that the central location of Telford should be maximised and promoted.

The Local Economic Assessment indicates that key sectors in the borough are: tourism, business and professional services, advanced manufacturing and food and drink. The group felt that a more commercial approach to exploiting these key sectors needed to be adopted to encourage investment. It was recognised that a competitive, pro-active sales approach could be an effective new approach to attracting new business into the borough.

At a local level the Council would be at the core of this work driving it forward however a more co-operative approach with local businesses would also be more successful at attracting businesses to invest in Telford, creating jobs and supporting a stronger local economy.

The group understood that there was a need to support existing businesses and provide a co-ordinated approach to current opportunities. The recent i54 development was identified as an opportunity and an area that required a quick and co-ordinated response. The group acknowledged that Telford and Wrekin is already proud to support successful businesses such as Makita, Ricoh, CapGemini, Smartwater, Golden Bear, University of Wolverhampton and Harper Adams, which are all part of the positive Image of Telford and Wrekin.

The group felt that the further exploitation of the World Heritage Site should be considered as a marketing opportunity for example 'Telford and Ironbridge' .

Recommended Supporting Actions

- Ensure good quality business sites are available and a continuum of these
- Review (and 'overhaul') the planning process in the council – to encourage business investment
- Improve co-ordination within the Council i.e. Asset and Property, Housing and Planning, Economic Development, Transport, Communications
- Allow the Economic Unit in the council the autonomy to make decisions quickly and effectively

- Enable local businesses and encourage them to be ambassadors for Telford both nationally and internationally
- Explore the opportunity of ‘twinning’ Telford and Wrekin with a foreign town for business opportunities. Review work already undertaken by Council and partners to assess if this could deliver the desired outcomes to encourage businesses to Telford and Wrekin and progress as appropriate
- Link to additional actions within Employment, Skills and Economy Commission Sub Group

3.3.3 **Recommendation 3: Improve the joined up tourism offer in Telford and Wrekin together with the co-ordination of marketing, PR and visitor information across the Borough**

Desired Impact:

- See also impact relating to recommendations 1, 4, and 5
In addition:
- Opportunities for higher education, good work experience and careers in tourism particularly for young people (link to Employment, Skills and Economy Commission Sub Group)
- Recognition of the increasing importance and value of volunteers (link to Volunteering Commission Sub Group)

The group looked at evidence documented in ‘A Draft Plan for Growth for Tourism and the Visitor Economy in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford’, which detailed that Tourism is the UK’s fifth biggest industry, injecting £97 billion each year into the economy of England and supporting 2.2 million jobs and that Heritage tourism alone is bigger than the advertising, film or car manufacturing industries. Its social and educational outcomes are substantial, contributing to neighbourhood renewal and cohesion and a better quality of life and civic pride.

Locally, information provided by the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, states that independent economic assessments show that the visitors to the Museum alone generate around £20m per annum of secondary spend into the local Telford & Wrekin economy each year. This figure excludes the Trust’s turnover. The Museum employs around 200 local people directly and provides volunteering opportunities for around 350 local volunteers. Related jobs in the supply chain and in terms of accommodation providers, totals many thousands.

Total visits to the World Heritage Site each year are approximately one million meaning that the estimated economic benefit of total visits to Ironbridge and the surrounding area would comfortably be in excess of £35m.

The group recognised the value of using Ironbridge to draw visitors to Telford, but then to use the ‘attract and disperse’ model to promote all the towns within Telford and Wrekin, in order to support the market/borough towns.

The group also recognised that Telford and Wrekin can’t stand still and do nothing, as we are in competition, especially from a tourism point of view.

Recommended Supporting Actions

- Ensure the sustainability and continuing effectiveness of the Tourism Unit in the Council
- Explore ‘Tourism Business Improvement districts’ as a stable source of tourism funding
- Strengthen the Telford Tourism Partnership – a unified approach to destination management by the public and private sectors is required.

- Conduct a strategic review of our ‘product’ to ensure it is fit for purpose and market accordingly
- Develop new offers and packages for both Business and Leisure tourists, working with the leisure, food and drink sectors
- Encourage business/conference tourism opportunities particularly leading from the new Southwater £250m investment at TIC
- Use business tourism to generate leisure stays and spending – free time delegate information/extra nights/partners/returns as leisure tourists
- Promote and ensure the effective use of the new leisure tourism and business tourism branding. See Appendix 2 illustrating the recently developed logos.
- Build on the nationally recognised brand that is the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site - use of the Ironbridge symbol and name in marketing literature
- Use Ironbridge to draw people to Telford and then disperse to other areas i.e. market towns – ‘attract and disperse’
- Plan and agree ‘destination’ marketing and management to develop the ‘place’ with key stakeholders
- Use the proximity of the River Severn and The Wrekin to offer opportunity for external audiences to “place” Telford and Wrekin in their mind and develop “propensity to visit”
- Present a ‘clear’ offer focusing on strong clear ‘consumable’ visitor products
- Aim for VisitEngland ‘attract brand’ status
- Strengthen and develop the Visitor Information Centres at the Ironbridge Gorge and Southwater in order to meet the needs of our visitors

3.3.4 **Recommendation 4: Build on Existing Events and Festivals to exploit and promote the assets of Telford and Wrekin, leading to a culturally vibrant place to live, work and visit**

Desired Impact:

- Generate overnight stays and return visits
- Greater use of local suppliers and artists
- Improved access for local community
- Increased volunteering opportunities
- Telford and Wrekin to be seen as a culturally vibrant place to live, work and visit

The group looked at evidence supplied in the West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy, which detailed that events and festivals are viewed as a key part of delivering an authentic experience and a significant driver in the growth of the short breaks market. There has been a huge growth in events and festivals over the last 10 years – 40% of all visitors to the UK take part in an event or festival during a short break to the UK. A competitive edge can be created in this market by adding value through exploitation of the strong leisure brands in the region that convey world-class culture – Ironbridge, as a World Heritage Site, is clearly key to this offer.

The group also felt that Telford and Wrekin has a real asset in the Town Park. It is a large, well-used park, that has been externally recognised by the Heritage Lottery Fund and as such has received over £2million external funding. The Town Park is an asset that should be maximised in terms of its potential to provide an annual programme of high quality events.

It is also important for Telford and Wrekin to be seen as a culturally vibrant place to live and to visit, and for our communities to have access to high-quality arts & cultural provision. This clearly fits with the wider Tourism agenda and making the most of the assets we have like the Town Park, The Place, etc.

Recommended Supporting Actions

- Identify and deliver the opportunities arising from London 2012
- Build on the legacy of the Torch Relay in Telford and Wrekin
- Identify and deliver the opportunities arising from the Diamond Jubilee in 2012
- Focus on the potential of the Town Park – build an effective annual events programme
- Consult and work with community groups to develop new cultural services for the people of Telford and Wrekin

3.3.5 **Recommendation 5: Promote Civic Pride for residents of Telford and Wrekin**

Desired Impact:

- Encourage residents, in particular young people, to wish to live and settle in Telford and Wrekin and positively promote Telford and Wrekin
- Improve community cohesion amongst the many diverse communities in Telford and Wrekin
- Improve the community's sense of identity – as individuals and as a community – the connections they feel with where they live and the people they live among

It should be noted that all actions outlined in recommendations 1 to 4, will have a positive effect on the Civic Pride felt by Telford and Wrekin residents.

The group recognised that, although this is an important key area of focus, they were not able to explore it in depth and that they would recommend that it is an important area that requires further attention. This was further evidenced by the Community Forum feedback.

Information contained within A Cultural Strategy for Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, states that Telford and Wrekin is thought of as a 'new town', created in 1968, however, the borough includes several market towns that pre-existed this: Wellington, Dawley, Donnington, Madeley, Oakengates, Ironbridge, and Newport. (In fact, Telford and Wrekin was originally Dawley New Town created in 1962 which led to the forming, in 1962, of what was originally Dawley Chamber of Commerce and is now Shropshire Chamber of Commerce). These historic market towns each have their own unique identity steeped in heritage, which the group felt needed to be recognised in addition to the development of the Town Centre, in order to improve the Image of Telford and Wrekin and therefore the civic pride felt by residents.

Culture and heritage is acknowledged as playing a critical role in the regional economy by contributing to quality of life, place making, the image of Telford and Wrekin and local pride. There are key groups of people who are less likely to participate in activities that lead to civic pride – these are most likely to include older people, ethnic minority communities including migrant workers, people with a limiting disability, longer-term unemployed people, those in lower socio-economic groups and people in rural areas. Some of the reasons are – transport limitations; financial barriers; limited awareness; lack of digital access; a lack of confidence in engaging. These are the areas that would need a co-operative approach in order to address and improve.

Recommended Supporting Actions

Working **with** community groups, via appropriate engagement methods, to:

- Set up a working group of appropriate community representatives, partners and council with a specific remit to focus on improving/promoting civic pride and identity of those who live in Telford and Wrekin.

- Consider increased support to market towns and build on community engagement. In addition build on the 'regeneration forum' to enable borough towns to co-ordinate and work together more effectively
- Explore/re-visit the 'Telford Totems' project - a trail from the station in and around Telford, celebrating local people and that could also be used as an educational tool
- Celebrate who and what Telford & Wrekin is and the community of T&W
- Establish a baseline of how 'proud' residents are with Telford and Wrekin (using existing data or consider commissioning a survey) and measure on an annual basis to understand the impact of the actions

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The group recognised that financial resources are limited and that improving the Image of Telford and Wrekin could be more effective if a more coordinated and co-operative approach was taken. The recommendations outlined above are seen as a step towards improving the coordination of activity and sharing of resources and good practice.

5.0 OVERLAP WITH OTHER COMMISSION SUB GROUPS

Employment, Skills & and Economy - Telford and Wrekin Council promotes itself as a 'Business Winning Council'

Appendix 1 Image of Telford and Wrekin Commission Sub Group Members

Graham Clark	Wellington Regeneration Partnership
Sherrel Fikeis	Connecting Communities Group
Tony Jemmett	Jemmett Manley and Associates
Steve Miller	Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust
Paul Shuttleworth	Radio Presenter
Cllr Clive Elliot	Telford and Wrekin Council
Arul Selvaratnam	Standards Committee, Telford and Wrekin Council
Richard Partington	Telford and Wrekin Council
Rev Keith Osmund-Smith	Co-ordinating Chaplain and Interim Street Pastor Co-ordinator
Mike Lowe	Dawley Regeneration Partnership
Katie Foster	Telford Tourism Partnership
Corin Crane	Telford and Wrekin Council

Group Support:

Clare Hall-Salter	Telford and Wrekin Council
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Telford Tourism Partnership



**Visit
Ironbridge**



**Meet
Telford
& Shropshire**