

MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 5 JANUARY 2022

ADDITIONAL PAPERS

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CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5 JANUARY 2022

PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

QUESTION FROM MR K WARD

I am involved in tourism and visitor attraction to NW Leics with both my Ashby Civic Society and Venture Theatre roles. I am keen to continue to make our area one which attracts visitors locals alike.

The report bases all its assumptions on the views of some stakeholders who appear to exclude a large number of interested parties. Apart from historical attractions you refer to arts and artistic events being an attraction. However, the only Stakeholders in the arts field are Mantle Lane Arts who produce hardly any art! Why weren't any drama/music or visual arts representatives included?

Ashby has an annual arts festival - perhaps the organisers would have liked to have been asked for their views? The Century Theatre and the Venture Theatre both attract audiences from outside the area - why weren't they asked?

To say that NWLDC staff were not working to attract tourists outside NW Leics is nonsense. It is well known that staff working at Ashby Tourist office were working for the whole district. They only worked half the week at Ashby and the other half at Coalville working on Tourism for the whole district. Didn't the Officers know that?

The report states that most tourists come to one attraction and then leave. Could this be because there is so little hotel and B & B accommodation in the district? Why haven't the Council done something to encourage more accommodation? The new report does not have an answer for this - why not?

The answer to increase future tourism to the District is not spelled out in the recommendations. They merely dwell on such statements as 'use of digital marketing channels' and 'providing leadership to local partners and stakeholders'. Also 'support the creation of networks between partners and stakeholders.

Who is going to provide such leadership and support networks and why isn't it already being done?

For the council to have wasted so much money on a such a vague consultant's report and to come to such feeble conclusions is appalling.

Why have you produced such a poor report regarding the Tourism/Visitor assessment for North West Leicestershire? Why has this been allowed to happen?

REPONSE

Mr Ward has submitted a question to this committee in relation to matters contained within Item 6 on tonight's agenda "The North West Leicestershire Visitor Economy Plan"

This report is the culmination of work which began back in 2018 and last came before Scrutiny Members on 20th November 2019 in the form of a paper entitled North West Leicestershire Tourism Strategy.

A review of our cultural services activities is required in order to ensure we are aligned with the Leicester and Leicestershire Tourism Growth Plan and that targets in that document

(which have subsequently been absorbed into our Council Delivery Plan) are delivered.

Between November 2019 and late 2020 we have sought to engage with a wide ranging set of stakeholders from across the district, in order to validate (or otherwise) the priority activities which were first proposed to members in 2019.

Stakeholder engagement undertaken in April 2020 was complicated by Covid Pandemic restrictions (lockdown). Significant effort was made by Fathom Consultants to contact as many stakeholders as possible at the time, but it was recognised that not all those who might have wanted to make a contribution were in a position to do so. For that reason a period of time was allowed between the preparation of the first draft of the Fathom Report (May 2020) and the final version (Dec 2020) during which any additional comments were collected and fed into the study. This was an opportunity that Mr Ward availed himself of between June and August last year.

The weaknesses of our district tourism offer (lack of accommodation and need for Leadership) as referred to by Mr Ward in his question, are the very same concerns as were raised by many other stakeholders. Tackling these two issues (plus others) are at the heart of the North West Leicestershire Visitor Economy Plan being put before Scrutiny Committee this evening.

Mr Ward makes reference in his question to whether the work of the Ashby TIC staff is purely about supporting visitors to Ashby or whether it has a wider district function. It is not appropriate to delve in detail into the job function of individual or small groups of staff in a meeting such as this, however it is worth noting that the Covid pandemic has demonstrated very well that you don't need to be physically in a location to deliver a service to that location.

Finally, it is noted that questions have been raised about the quality of the Fathom Report. That report is a background paper which has been used by officers along with a significant library of other materials to develop today's Scrutiny Report. The key strength of the Fathom Report is that it enabled officers to validate the proposed priority activities with a range of local Stakeholders. Moving forward, (subject to receiving Cabinet support) we will be able to further engage with stakeholders to determine the specific interventions needed to deliver each of the four priorities.