

**TITLE OF REPORT:**           **Monitoring of OSC Review of Opportunities to Promote Rural Gateshead**

**REPORT OF:**               **Paul Dowling, Strategic Director, Communities and Environment**

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### **SUMMARY**

This report provides a summary update on the actions arising from the OSC Review of Opportunities to Promote Rural Gateshead.

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### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To highlight progress on the implementation of the OSC Review of Opportunities to Promote Rural Gateshead and to seek the Committee's views on progress to date and future planned actions.

### **Background**

2. The Council agreed in 2015 that the OSC should carry out a review examining the promotion of rural Gateshead as both a tourism and business location. Rural communities have significant economic potential and can contribute to the economic growth of both the borough as a whole but also the wider region. The review recognised the role of tourism in protecting, preserving and celebrating the cultural heritage and identity of the area, and that it can create opportunities for new businesses and job creation via more effective use of rural assets.
3. The scope of the review was agreed as:
  - **Business Growth** – To review services that support economic growth in the rural areas examining the potential for new businesses based around key assets. It will also review the partnerships approach to rural economic growth and the potential for new business and visitor accommodation to help improve economic performance.
  - **Emerging Places** – To review the services that deliver enhanced visitor potential, e.g. tourism activities, (including events,) environmental sustainability, volunteering opportunities etc. It will also explore better use for of key assets for economic purposes such as the Angel of the North.
4. The committee concluded their work would result in:
  - Ensuring that clear arrangements are in place within the Council and in

partner agencies for improving the promotion of the rural area as both a tourism and business location.

- Enhancing effective and efficient working and avoiding duplication.
- Providing direction as to the adherence of national policy.

5. The following issues were identified by the review –

- The untapped potential of many of the boroughs rural assets and a lack of visitor accommodation.
- The need to continue to work with local, regional, national and international partners to grow the number of day visitors and overnight stays.
- The need to work with the private sector to maximise the investment in the tourism businesses infrastructure.
- The lack of suitable, affordable business space in rural areas.
- The need to improve business communication and collaboration and ensure access to business support.
- Recognition of the need for enhanced partnership working to maximise the economic benefit for rural communities.
- Recognition of the impact of the rural area on health and wellbeing.

## **Final Recommendations**

6. This report aims to summarise the key findings from the OSC's review of promoting rural Gateshead as a tourism and business location:

- (i) The Council should maximise the visitor potential of rural assets, thereby creating the best possible environment for tourism, new business development and job creation. Further research should be undertaken into the development of a 4 star hotel and to explore how the wider accommodation offer can be enhanced. The economic potential of key sites such as Gibside and the Angel of the North should be encouraged.
- (ii) There is scope to ensure that Council spending in the rural area seeks to maximise benefits to local businesses, residents and visitors – to make best use of resources and impact multiple agendas.
- (iii) There is scope to improve the tourism offer by increasing the choice and quality of the food offer, and also to identify gaps in the provision of rural services.

- (iv) Highly skilled people are needed if the tourism potential of rural Gateshead is to be realised. Apprenticeships opportunities should be explored.
- (v) There is the need to better coordinate the promotion of events in the borough, including those of public private and voluntary sector bodies. This would help promote the borough as a day visitor location and support the growth of jobs and businesses.
- (vi) There is a need to continue to support the work of the Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership and maximise the potential for economic and cultural benefits arising from the programme.
- (vii) Discussions have highlighted a desire for NGI to have a more proactive role in marketing Gateshead as a whole including maximising the opportunities for promoting the rural areas of the borough.
- (viii) Research has demonstrated a continued lack of high quality, affordable business space in rural communities, therefore support to develop new enterprise hubs should continue, including the opportunities for existing cultural venues to generate income to support their future sustainability.
- (ix) The Council provides a borough wide business support offer, however opportunities to enhance this should be considered. External funding should be sought where possible to provide business support and help overcome isolation and provide networking opportunities. Opportunities to train people in key growth sectors should be encouraged as part of an approach to create higher level jobs in rural areas.

### **What has happened since completion of the review?**

7. A **Cultural Tourism Project Manager** post has been created within the Economic and Housing Growth Service to deliver Cultural Tourism based initiatives in rural areas. This has been funded through the re-designation of resources. The work programme of this post will be jointly managed by Economic and Housing Growth and the Culture Team in Culture, Communities, Leisure and Volunteering.”
8. The **Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership** is now fully up and running with Groundwork NE & Cumbria the lead partner. Work has already taken to place to uncover the remains of a 17<sup>th</sup> century iron works in Derwenthaugh Park with further work planned to restore the scheduled ancient monument. Work is also underway to restore another scheduled ancient monument; Whinfield Coke Ovens near Highfield. Both projects involve providing better access and interpretation. Improvements to the public rights of way network are also planned with work taking place at Milkwellburn Woods, near Chopwell and in Greenside later in the year.

The Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre is at the planning application stage with Groundwork NE & Cumbria the applicant. This £1 million plus scheme has been developed in partnership with the Council and Northumbria University, who held a design competition for its architecture students. Over 35 designs were submitted with the 'water wheel' by Matthew Glover the overwhelming favourite at a public consultation. Work to secure the complete funding package is ongoing with decisions expected later this year from the two major funders.

9. **Angel of North site** – initial work has started to gather an information pack regarding the site by working with officers across the council. This will help assess 'what we know' and identify gaps in our knowledge that will need to be filled through the outcome of a feasibility study. A tender call will be designed and sent out to potential consultants in the New Year, with a report outlining an options appraisal returned in the spring/ summer.
10. **Promoting Rural Gateshead.** Further discussions have taken place with NGI to develop a marketing campaign to promote the rural area. This will address the need for greater relevance to be given to the rural assets of Gateshead in future Newcastle Gateshead Initiative (NGI) Visitor Guides/ marketing materials. £40k of NGI support time has been allocated, along with officer time to move this work forward. This **marketing campaign will be launched in spring 2017.**

Additionally, the Council is working with the Destination Management Organisations (DMO's) across the NELEP area, including the NewcastleGateshead Initiative (NGI) to enhance the collective assets of the region, with the aim of attracting more overnight visitors and therefore retaining spend in the area. It is exploring access to funding from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to support this approach.

Plans for the first calls for EAFRD funding are still being developed and are expected to be launched in late September. The programme is expected to provide grants to support the development of high quality accommodation and tourism development including attractions. Opportunities for public sector projects will be explored.

11. **The Council has identified the following funding opportunities to support the development of rural assets and attract additional visitors to the area:**

The RGN's Strategic Economic Infrastructure Fund supports the development of Strategic Tourism initiatives, whilst its Rural Business Growth Fund provides funding for capital equipment to support the growth of new and existing businesses. A new round of Rural Growth Network funding closes on the 3rd October, with the council promoting access to the grants widely through its networks and contacts. In addition funding from the LEADER programme will become available to support economic growth activity.

- 12. Work has continued with the private sector to **maximise the investment in the tourism businesses infrastructure in Gateshead:**

Daniel Farm near Crawcrook which opened earlier this year now employs 25 staff has been awarded the North East Rural Business start-up award at the recent NE awards sponsored by NCJ Media and ARCH, the Northumberland Development Company. The owner has recently purchased an adjoining farm and is currently exploring opportunities to extend recreational and tourism activity both at this and the existing site. The Council continues to explore opportunities to support this work.

Bradley Gardens, also located near Crawcrook employing approximately 38 people is exploring options for develop the site to improve parking, kitchen facilities and enhance commercial activities and increase staffing levels further.

- 13. Supporting the development of **affordable business space in rural areas:**

The Enterprise Hub based at the Kibblesworth Village Millennium Centre is now fully occupied, with three new and existing businesses. The numbers of jobs supported through the facility were underestimated, with 12 posts now supported. The income generated by the hub is helping the sustainability of the centre.

Marley Hill Community Centre has received first stage approval for Rural Growth Network funding to develop an enterprise hub. The centre is now developing more detailed plans, relating to a second stage application.

Clara Vale Community Association is also in the process of developing such a hub. Whilst the Council provided initial support on the concept, the centre has secured funding for some external consultancy to assist the process. Funding has now been secured to develop stage one of the hub.

- 14. The council continues to explore opportunities to access external funding to **support the business development process**. Officers continue to support businesses via the services provided through the Economic and Housing Growth Service – including externally funded provision. This includes support for business plans, networking opportunities and grants to support jobs and employment opportunities. Support is also provided to grow the social enterprise provision.

**Recommendation:**

- 15. Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to comment on whether sufficient progress has been achieved in the implementation of the Review of opportunities to Promote Rural Gateshead.

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