

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

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

SUMMARY

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

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 and filled within the Culture, Communities, Leisure and Volunteering Service to deliver Cultural Tourism based initiatives in rural areas. This has been funded through the re-designation of resources. The post holder has three main areas of work; the Land of Oak & Iron project including the Heritage Centre; investigating options for the Angel of the North site and leading on the rural Gateshead marketing campaign.
8. The **Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership** is progressing with activity well underway in rural Gateshead. Work has taken place to resurface a section of Greenside waggonway and along the route of the former Garesfield to Chopwell railway between Chopwell and Milkwellburn Wood.

The Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre has planning permission in place with Groundwork NE & Cumbria the applicant. This £1.5m million plus scheme has been developed with support from 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 in the next few weeks from the two major funders.

9. **Angel of North site** – a pre-planning application has been submitted to Development Management to gather information from across the Council on the issues to be considered. A setting study has been commissioned that will examine the impact of potential development. Northumbria University have used the possible visitor centre type development as a design project for their post-graduate architecture students and have provided 30 design concepts. Once complete, all of this work will inform early discussions with potential funders. These discussions will take place in the next month.
10. **Promoting Rural Gateshead.** NGI are leading on a marketing campaign to promote the rural area and are working towards a launch in early summer. Work includes the production of a bespoke rural Gateshead flyer for distribution across the region, dedicated digital content and media partnerships with the written press and radio. £40k of NGI support time has been allocated for this scheme with officer time from the Council to co-ordinate the activity. Additional brown tourism signage, paid for by the private sector, has been added to help attract new visitors to key sites.
11. **The Council has identified the following funding opportunities to support the development of rural assets and attract additional visitors to the area:**

The North Pennines Dales LEADER programme has been relaunched with £1.5m of funding available over the next 2 years. Priorities include rural tourism, culture and heritage, rural business and services. Job creation and business growth are the required outputs. The programme covers the areas within the Rural Economic Strategy which tie in with the ONS rural classification.

The RGN's Strategic Economic Infrastructure Fund supports the development of strategic tourism initiatives and enterprise hubs, whilst its Rural Business Growth Fund provides funding for capital equipment to support the growth of new and existing businesses. An upcoming funding call is expected with £1m available. The majority of businesses in the Rural Economic Strategy area can apply.

Workshops have taken place on EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development). Funding of £9.7m is available with calls currently open for business development, food processing and tourism infrastructure. In most cases eligibility is tied to the ONS rural classification.

12. Work has continued to **maximise the investment in the tourism infrastructure in Gateshead, including the business infrastructure:**

Daniel Farm near Crawcrook now employs 25 staff and was awarded the North East Rural Business start-up award in Oct 2016 at the NE Rural

Awards. Work has continued to extend the high quality food and drink offer including providing higher value produce such as venison within the butchery department. The Council continues to explore opportunities to support the enterprise.

The Gibside Estate plays a key role in rural tourism in Gateshead, with visitor numbers on an upward trend. The National Trust has recently appointed a part time Enterprise Advisor, who will support the development of new initiatives on the estate.

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

The Enterprise Hub based at the Kibblesworth Village Millennium Centre is still fully occupied. The income generated by the hub is supporting the sustainability of the centre.

Clara Vale Community Association is also in the process of developing an enterprise 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 and a community cafe.

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.

Officers supported Wood Fuel Barn in High Spen to secure Rural Growth Business Funding to the value of £20,442. The company supplies seasoned logs and the funding has allowed them to build a new log seasoning shed whilst offering three employment opportunities and increasing output capacity by 50%.

Support is ongoing to assist with the development of the 'Café' at Thornley Woodland Centre. The business plan is complete and the business owner is in the process of registering as a Community Interest Company. Once this is complete the process of a community asset transfer will commence.

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.

Contact: Andrew Marshall, Lindsay Murray.

Extension: 3422, 2794