

MINUTES of the meeting of Community Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Royal Hotel, Royal Parade, Ross on Wye, Herefordshire. on Friday, 16th June, 2006 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	A.C.R. Chappell (Chairman)
	Councillor	H. Bramer (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	Mrs. P.A. Andrews, M.R. Cunningham, Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels, J.G.S. Guthrie, D.C. Taylor and P.G. Turpin
	Co-opted Members	A. Blackshaw (Tourism Representative) and Mrs. E. Newman (Herefordshire Association of Local Councils)

In attendance: Councillors: Mrs M.D. Lloyd-Hayes, R.V. Stockton (Cabinet Member – Community Services) and R.M. Wilson.

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors: R.B.A Burke, J.C. Mayson (Cabinet Member) A. L. Williams and from Mr. G. Jones (Tourism Sector).

11. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Mrs. P.A. Andrews substituted for Councillor A.L. Williams. Mr. A. Blackshaw substituted for Mr. G. Jones.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

13. MINUTES

Copies of the minutes had been previously circulated to Members and were available at the meeting. Subject to minor grammatical and textural changes the Committee approved the minutes.

RESOLVED: That the minutes for the meeting held on 6th June, 2006, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

No suggestions were received on issues for future scrutiny from the members of the public present.

15. DISCUSSION OF THE ECONOMIC AND TOURIST BENEFIT OF THE RIVER WYE IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee sought the views of a range of interested parties on the current economic and tourist benefit of the River Wye for Herefordshire and how it could be

improved.

The Chairman acknowledged receipt of a question from Mr G. Thomas, concerning the riverbank near the Old Bridge, Hereford, which, being subject to litigation, would be dealt with by the Director.

The Chairman welcomed the following invited guests:

Mr. M Bristow	Wye Valley AONB
Mr. R. V. Bryan	Herefords & District Anglers Association
Mr. M Davies	PGL Travel Ltd
Mr. S. Evans	Wye & Usk Foundation
Mr. M. Fellowes	Hereford City Council
Mrs. R. Gardner	Kingfisher Cruses
Mr. R. Gething	Herefordshire Association of Local Councils
Mr. R. Gibbon	Herefords Rowing Club
Cllr. N. Gibbs	Ross Town Council
Mrs. J. Lewis	Cultural Services Manager (Acting) Herefordshire Council
Mr. M. Mills	Environment Agency (Wales)
Mrs. C. Spaul	Hereford City Partnership
Cllr. W.J.S. Thomas	Wye Forum

The Chairman reported that the agenda item sought to be the start of ongoing debate on the economic and tourist benefit of the River Wye, and explore what further actions are, or can, be undertaken by the Council, Town or Parish Councils, local businesses or the Environment Agency to improve those benefits for the County.

The meeting was structured into sections by the Chairman asking the invited guests to contribute or comment in relation to a question on their sphere of interest. The following is the question followed by the principal points arising during discussion:

What is happening already within the Herefordshire Council's Tourism Section?

- The 2004 Heart of England Tourist Board survey identified that 33% of visitors came for the countryside. A further visitor survey would be undertaken this year with the results expected in 2007.
- The number of visitor responses were monitored, particularly following articles in the national press. The Tourism Section assist when journalists from national papers visit the county. The Walking Festival and the Wye Valley Walk were good selling points.
- The shortage of visitor accommodation was becoming a problem. Increased bookings in the lead up to the Three Choirs Festival had lead to accommodation further out into the county for example in the black and white villages and market towns being offered.
- A number of legal and practical issues would need to be addressed before pleasure boat trips from the City could be considered.
- The Hay Festival offered good examples of visitor packages.
- More could be made of the "picturesque movement" popularised in a book by Rev W. Gilpin and highlighted by recent publicity in a publication.

What are the Town and Parish Councils doing with the river and what would they like to see done?

- Ross Town Council had undertaken improvement works to the bandstand and its environs, however, no specific river related works had been

considered.

- Hereford City Council considered it important that the ancient manorial rights to the river be protected and suggested that as a number of 'rights' were held in trust they could be registered with the Charity Commission. It was confirmed that information on this point had been passed to Herefordshire Council.
- While there were various festivals and regattas it was thought that these could be further developed by the inclusion of villages/parishes along the river and by following a common theme, as happened on major rivers on the continent.
- While a large proportion of visitors use the rights of way network, access to the river was primarily across private land.
- Leader+ funding (a European funding initiative) had been used to develop individual projects within the county. It was suggested that these projects needed packaging and marketing. It was noted that Leader+ funding was not directly available to the City.
- A question was raised as to whether public rights of way could be vested in a Parish Council.
- It was suggested that existing rights of way should be maintained before looking at creating new ones. Reference was made to the national 'Lost Ways' project.

How do the users of the river see the importance of the river?

- Pleasure cruise boats were subject to marine coastguard inspections. Therefore there had to be sufficient navigable river to make a cruise business viable, which wasn't the case in the City. While pre booked groups for cruises were accommodated most customers were individual or family parties. Drawbacks to the existing businesses in Symonds Yat related to narrow roads and overgrown footpaths.
- The Hereford Rowing Club hosted five affiliated clubs and organised events e.g. the rowing regatta and 'Beer On the Wye 2'. Their clubhouse site was also used by visitors for overnight camping and canoe storage.
- The Hereford & District Anglers Association reported that the number of course fishing members was between 300/400 with 2183 visitors each year. While the Wye had been a premier salmon river, stocks had now declined. Large sums had been invested (£3m) to address the decline. Fishing made a considerable contribution to the local economy. Further information would be provided to the Chairman.
- PGL Travel Ltd provided residential activity courses and adventure holidays in the UK and overseas and employed approximately 400 at their head quarters in Ross. The river and countryside provided an important area and lifestyle from which to grow the business.

What are the commercial and tourism sectors doing to encourage use of the river?

- Visit Herefordshire were formulating various plans and consultation would be undertaken in due course.
- The riverbanks, particularly in the City were untidy with litter. Signage to the river needed improvement. While local citizens had access to organised river use e.g. rowing or angling clubs, many wanted occasional pleasure access e.g. walking, fishing or boating. Visitor satisfaction levels were lower than those for Worcester who had riverside facilities.

Comments made by the Environment Agency or environmental groups.

- The Wye Forum was a body established to enable people or bodies to air their concerns. It also provided direction or advice to the public on the many professional bodies that may be best placed to assist with their concern.
- The Environment Agency explained that they monitor the quality and quantity of the river and manage the expectations of the many users. This was subject to various factors and challenges which needed to be handled in a sympathetic way e.g. the difference in needs between fishing and canoeing. Also as Navigation Authority they had oversight of commercial craft. The Agency had a role to play in developing the diverse use of the river but could not undertake this role alone.
- The Wye Waterway Plan incorporating the Wye Navigation Plan, produced by the Environment Agency, was a good source of information and set out their vision and key aims and objectives. While resources were limited the Agency would seek to co-operate and facilitate projects. The Navigation Act determined membership of their advisory committee. The Chairman commented that the Wye Waterway Plan was an informative document.
- The Wye Valley AONB representative commented that the Wye was a river of national importance designated by AONB, SSSI etc. £26m had been allocated to improve sections of the river between Hereford and Chepstow.

The Chairman thanked the invited guests and public for attending and for expressing their views or comments. He intended that this meeting would be the start of ongoing discussions on the subject culminating in the relevant Cabinet Members considering the future use of the river.

16. ANNUAL REPORT ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Committee received a report from the Cabinet Member (Community Services) on activity in the Community Services programme area.

A report had been prepared by the Cabinet Member (Community Services) outlining the issues which had affected the programme area during 2005/06 and indicated some of the challenges for 2006/07.

In addition to highlighting aspects of his report the Cabinet Member also reported in particular:

- That the restructure of the Directorate was proceeding well. While Youth Services had been moved to the Children's Services portfolio, his portfolio had gained Public Rights of Way (PROW).
- The Destination Management Partnership, being a public/private partnership, were working towards establishing joint budgets.
- That congratulations be extended to the people of Leominster for their fundraising efforts to support the new swimming pool. Questioned on the swimming pool in Ross-on-Wye he commented that once the local flood alleviation scheme came to fruition, he hoped that eventually the Ross pool could be improved.
- Phase 3 of the Museum Resource and Learning Centre had now commenced.

The Committee noted the report by the Cabinet Member. The following is an outline of the responses and comments made during the ensuing questioning of the Cabinet Member:

- The Chairman congratulated the Cabinet Member on the provision of a new mobile library.

- Members noted that works to fill the potholes in Queenswood car park would very soon commence and that a further improvement scheme would commence in January 2007.
- Members also noted that the line of the former canal at Aylestone Park was protected in planning terms. The Canal Trust also received an annual income through a Section 108 Agreement from the new flats near the former canal basin in Newtown Road.
- Plans for a new central library were linked to the plans for the Edgar Street Grid development. It was intended that all Members would be involved in a seminar regarding the draft proposals in late 2006.
- The Committee were pleased to hear of the work being undertaken to co-ordinate the involvement of Herefordshire in the 2012 Olympics.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for his report and for responding to the Committee's questioning.

17. **END OF YEAR REPORT ON PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

The Committee received a report on the end of year performance position for 2005/06 relating to the Economic and Community Services Division within the Adult and Community Services Directorate.

The report provided commentary about a selection of Best Value and Local Performance Indicators, all of which were included within the Corporate Plan and were reported in line with the Annual Operating Plan requirements. Issues, challenges and concerns relating to the Performance Indicators and services in general were also reported on. The detail of the performance for each Service Block was set out in Appendix 1 to the report. Appendix 2 to the report set out the new set of indicators that corresponded with the Corporate Plan and Local Area Agreement.

On scrutinising the report the Committee noted that in relation to the “% of people who use parks ...” information had been compiled from the Resident's Satisfaction Survey. Work was under way to ascertain any reason for the slight dip in satisfaction against this target. In relation to the increase in performance indicator “alcohol related crime and disorder incidents” it was reported that this was probably due to the increased detection activity of the police rather than the introduction of new licensing legislation.

RESOLVED

That

(a) the report on Economic and Community Services Performance be noted;

(b) areas of concern continue to be monitored;

and;

(c) the new indicators, attached at Appendix 2 to the report, be noted and adopted.

The meeting ended at 12.00 p.m.

CHAIRMAN