

Leisure, Tourism & Heritage Committee – 27 July 2006

Minutes of the meeting of the **Leisure, Tourism & Heritage Committee** held on **27 July 2006** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs T J Capon
Vice-Chairman: Cllr P R Robinson

Cllr R A Amner
Cllr T E Goodwin
Cllr C J Lumley

Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr Mrs M J Webster

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr J Thomass

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J P Cottis, J R F Mason and C G Seagers.

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	- Chief Executive
S Rom	- Economic Development Officer
S Worthington	- Committee Administrator

262 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

263 BIRD WATCHING – TOURISM POTENTIAL

The Committee welcomed Mr P Fisher, South Essex Projects Manager of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) to the meeting. Mr Fisher had been invited to give a presentation to Members on the tourism potential for bird watching within the District, in relation to the 'green grid' strategy for the Thames Gateway South Essex area.

During the presentation the following points were noted:-

- The RSPB was an international organisation based in Bedfordshire with a very large volunteer base.
- The RSPB had over 1 million members throughout the UK.
- The RSPB managed the land of nature reserves, undertook marketing, retail and informed and implemented Government and European policy.
- The RSPB had been undertaking land management of nature reserves for over 100 years, working at international, regional and local levels.

- The nearest RSPB local group, the South East Essex local group, was based in Southend on Sea and was run by local people.
- The RSPB was realigning itself to match more closely the existing regional boundaries.
- New nature reserves were being developed in the Thames Gateway area.
- Since 2001 the RSPB had been developing a range of new projects in South Essex. The challenge in this area was to create new and sustainable green infrastructures, but a range of new partnerships have been established.
- The RSPB wished to become more heavily involved in community engagement; an RSPB community team had been working for the past year at Wat Tyler Country Park.
- The RSPB was a member of the South Essex Green Grid Partnership.
- The RSPB would be opening 2 new nature reserves in South Essex, one at Rainham Marshes, the other at Vange Marshes.
- The RSPB had run public events at Coalhouse Fort, East Tilbury and at Leigh sea front and Southend Pier.
- In 2000 the RSPB commissioned a survey that assessed the impact on the local economy of public interest in the North Norfolk coast and in the nature reserve at Titchwell Marsh. Visitors spent around £1.5million, citing that they enjoyed birds and wildlife and the peace and tranquillity as reasons for visiting. This spend supported 39 direct and indirect FTE jobs.
- In Morecambe the Local Authority worked with the RSPB and other partners on altering the town's image, as it needed to attract more visitors and business to the town. A series of themed artwork featuring birds were developed at the sea front in Morecambe. A series of profile raising events were run which demonstrated the economic value of birds and conservation to the local economy.
- The RSPB had also worked closely with the Local Authority in the Ribble estuary to develop a discovery centre which had subsequently become a resource for local schools as well as a regular visitor attraction.
- The RSPB had worked in partnership with the Environment Agency and the local farming community in rural Lincolnshire, near Boston, to remove the sea wall and to create a managed re-alignment. Inter tidal habitats were subsequently formed, utilising farmland. Lagoons were created that were soon inhabited by birds. In the first year the area received over 60,000 visitors, which made a major contribution to the local economy in terms of accommodation, pubs, etc.
- The RSPB was excited at the prospect of getting to know the Rochford District better, to build on its activities in other parts of South East Essex. Rochford had a wild coastline which was changing, with ground levels sinking and sea levels rising. The RSPB had been involved in the wetlands project at Wallasea Island which involved building new sea walls further inland, raising existing land levels to create salt marsh and providing a more robust flood defence and natural landscape.

Responding to a Member concern relating to Shell Haven, Mr Fisher advised that the RSPB had been one of the public consultees on proposals for the development of a deep sea container port at Shell Haven and had

recommended a series of mitigation proposals to minimise disruption to wildlife in the vicinity.

In response to a further concern raised about wind turbines, Mr Fisher confirmed that the RSPB, although in favour of renewable sources of energy, did recognise the danger to birds of wind turbines, which should not be sited in areas that were important to birds.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to infrastructure problems associated with newly created nature reserves, Mr Fisher confirmed that the RSPB worked closely with local communities to ensure that any issues associated with access to these sites were addressed at a early stage as part of the planning process to minimise disruption to local residents.

Officers advised, in response to a Member enquiry relating to the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park, that any proposals to develop the park as a site of interest for bird watching had to be balanced against the fact that the park was situated within the flight path of London Southend Airport.

Members observed that the former civic amenity site in Great Wakering offered great potential for a managed nature reserve, particularly in light of the variety of birds present in that area, including Brent geese and oyster catchers, which appeared immune to the activity on MoD land nearby.

Members concurred that, given the work currently undertaken by the RSPB in South Essex, there would be merit in officers working closely with the RSPB to identify suitable sites that might be suitable as nature reserves, building on the Council's tourism strategy. It was agreed that a letter would be sent to the Parish Councils asking for their views on potential sites within the district and that Members would similarly advise officers of any suggested sites they might have.

Resolved

That officers work with the RSPB to identify specific sites within the Rochford District that could potentially be developed as nature reserves / areas of tourism and report back to this Committee in due course. (CE)

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm.

Chairman

Date