

UPDATE ON BRAINSTORMING MEETING OF 17 JANUARY 2007

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a summary of the ideas put forward at the recent brainstorming meeting of this Committee and clarify areas for specific action and attention.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 A brainstorming meeting of the Leisure, Tourism & Heritage Committee took place on the 17 January 2007, where all Members were invited to put forward their ideas in relation to the development of the “cultural offer” of the District.
- 2.2 Brief discussions took place around each of the items suggested, covering a wide range of ideas that included one-off events, improved facilities and general promotion of the District. A full summary of these items is detailed in section 3 of this report.

3 SUMMARY OF IDEAS

- 3.1 A number of the suggestions were linked to the staging of events or activities that promoted or celebrated specific historical/heritage related aspects of the District:-
- Commemoration of 1000 years since the Battle of Ashingdon
 - Viking Festival
 - Promotion of the Anne Boleyn/ Henry V111 link to the area (Tudor Festival)
 - Exhibition related to the “Beagle”
 - The development of initiatives related to the District's historical churches and indeed other historical buildings.
 - Staging of an annual event in celebration of St Georges Day.
- 3.2 Further suggestions centred more around general events/activities that would contribute to generating increased public interest:-
- Themed events staged in the town centres.
 - Celebration of the 700 year anniversary of Rochford Market Square.
 - Pro active approach towards arranging organised “street performers” in the town centres.

- Cycling event Rayleigh Town Centre.
- Development of a guided walk around Rochford.
- The provision of an “official tour” around the District’s key attractions/ buildings.
- Low tide day.
- River regatta at Hullbridge.

3.3 In the category of improving the District’s infrastructure the following items were put forward:-

- Provision of specific cycle routes and cycle lanes on various roads.
- Traffic care signage such as speed warning signs.
- Improving access points to the Crouch and Roach.
- Provision of additional hides for land based bird watching.
- Reviewing the provision for caravanning/camping.
- Improving the level of brown signage or directional signage for key facilities.

3.4 There were also a number of other suggestions covering a range of miscellaneous topics as follows:-

- Facilitate and/or encourage more bed and breakfast accommodation, possibly in conjunction with the local farming community.
- The possibility of a Tourism Centre at 57 South Street (however, a separate report has been produced on the future of this building).
- Working with garden centres to encourage the provision of tea shops on their sites.
- Involving Parish Councils with various events and initiatives.

4 INITIAL CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

4.1 Having given due consideration to the range and nature of the ideas put forward at this meeting, it is clear that Members felt that the District had a great deal of history/heritage that could be used to much greater benefit, through the staging of specific events and activities such as mentioned in section 3.1. This benefit could be related to the tourism offer of the District or in generating local public interest.

- 4.2 There also seemed to be a consensus of opinion that an annual event to celebrate St George's Day was a worthwhile project that should continue to be organised in future years, subject to the appropriate funding being available.
- 4.3 With regard to some of the specific ideas that prompted lengthier discussion than others, and indeed fairly comprehensive support, the following items appeared to stand out:-
- Improving the level of brown signage or directional signage for key facilities/attractions around the District.
 - Developing a pro active approach to increasing the number of organised “street performers” in the town centres.
 - Establishing a guided walk around Rochford or “official tour” of the District’s attractions and places of interest.
- 4.4 As mentioned at the “brainstorming meeting”, the Council does have a limited resource available to develop these events and initiatives and, therefore, it will be necessary to prioritise a limited number of events. As part of the development of these ideas, research should be carried out into the potential of involving other partners, whether they be volunteer groups or official organisations/clubs/societies, etc. Developing this “facilitating” role for the Council, in addition to some direct action, will increase the capacity available to undertake any new initiatives.
- 4.5 Linked to the above point, it may be worth researching the availability of external grants that may fund or part fund additional human resource. For example, a Heritage Officer through the Heritage Lottery Fund. If there does appear to be potential funding, then further consideration would need to be given to any additional resource implications that it may have for the Council in relation to the “Value for Money” it would provide.
- 4.6 Any initiatives would need to be linked to the work that has already been carried out in relation to tourism and key planning documents such as the emerging Local Development Framework.

5 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The staging of new events/initiatives and/or increased promotion of the District’s attractions and facilities, will generate increased local interest and potentially have a positive impact on local business, particularly in the town centres when specific events are staged.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The initial research and development of any potential new initiatives would be carried out within the Council's Leisure Development Team. This research, and any conclusions formed, should include any potential cost to the Council so that they can be considered thoroughly and, if required, bids be made

within the Council's budget setting process in addition to submitting appropriate external funding applications.

7 RECOMMENDATION

7.1 It is proposed that the Committee RESOLVES

- (1) To agree to the staging of an appropriate annual event to celebrate St George's Day.
- (2) To approach Essex County Council with proposals for improved directional and brown tourism signage for key facilities in the District.
- (3) To undertake further research into the other items mentioned in sections 4.1 and 4.3 of this report and to bring back a further report on the outcomes from this research that prioritises which of these ideas is to be taken further.
- (4) That officers explore the possibilities of external grants to fund additional human resource capacity. For example, a Heritage Officer.

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Background Papers:-

None

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