Tourism VFM
Task Group Notes

Notes of the meeting of the Tourism VFM Task Group held on Friday 11 May 2012 at Sunset Park, Hambleton

Members present:

Councillor Anderson
Councillor Balmain
Councillor Brooks (Chairman for this meeting)
Councillor Cocker

Officers present:

Peter Foulsham, Scrutiny Officer

Others present:

Michael Taylor, Vice Chairman of the Wyre Tourism Association

TM.29 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lady Atkins (Task Group Chairman), E Anderton, Hewitt, and Turner.

TM.30 Declarations of Interest

None.

TM.31 Wyre Tourism Association (WTA)

The Chairman, Cllr Brooks, thanked Michael Taylor, Vice Chairman of the Wyre Tourism Association for agreeing to meet with members of the task group and for hosting the meeting at Sunset Park.

Mr Taylor explained that he had been involved with the Wyre Tourism Association (WTA) since its inception twenty years ago. He said that he had always greatly valued the support that the WTA had received from the
Tourism Development Officer, Alexandra Holt. The Association had appreciated that very much. He added that it appeared to him that Ms Holt would benefit from an additional resource to provide the level of administrative support that had existed before recent restructures.

Mr Taylor reminded task group members about the changes that were in process involving Marketing Lancashire, a county-wide initiative that was designed to promote Lancashire as a whole, as a tourism destination. A new Chairman, Paul Heathcote, had recently been appointed and a Chief Executive would be appointed in due course.

Mr Taylor said that, in his opinion, Wyre Council was not marketing tourism effectively at present, and there was a significant shift towards the marketing of Lancashire rather than districts and towns within it. Cllr Brooks asked Mr Taylor about the reduction in the number of paying members of the WTA over the past five years, with a particularly dramatic reduction from 91 in 2010 to 58 in 2011, a reduction of 36%. Mr Taylor said that he believed that it was due, in part at least, to the economic pressures felt by people in the tourism industry.

Regarding Tourist Information Centres (TICs), Mr Taylor said that he believed members of the public valued them as places at which they could interact with the Council on a wide variety of issues, which was important since the closure of the Area Offices and the Citizens Advice Bureau offices.

It was noted that WTA members did not include a membership logo on their promotional literature, although other accreditation was reflected (e.g. Enjoy England, David Bellamy Conservation Award). A sample of literature from the WTA section of one of the borough’s TICs showed that only 50% of brochures were actually from paid up members of the WTA.

The Chairman asked Mr Taylor how he thought the WTA was assisted by the Council. He responded by saying that it made little difference in his opinion and that members of the WTA were actually very effective at carrying out their own promotion and marketing. He added that it was his view that Wyre was not directing its resources to the right place and that if given an opportunity to look at tourism afresh, with a clean sheet of paper, savings of up to 50% could be achieved. It was his view that the Council should direct any tourism resources towards Marketing Lancashire, rather than focusing within the borough of Wyre. The emphasis on Wyre as a tourist destination was outdated and the Council’s full focus should be on Lancashire and on named towns within it. They were the names that meant something to people from outside the area, whereas ‘Wyre’ was not well understood. Mr Taylor said that he would not be sorry to see the end of the ‘What’s on in Wyre’, for example.

Members concluded that ‘Wyre’ as a means of promoting tourism lacked recognition and should no longer be used. The concept of ‘Lancashire as a destination’ should be grasped wholeheartedly. Mr Taylor agreed with
these conclusions, adding that people tend to think in terms of regions rather than smaller geographical areas or towns; ‘The Lake District’, ‘The Dordogne’ or ‘Lancashire’ would be more meaningful to potential tourists that, say, ‘Wyre’, ‘Bergerac’ or ‘Garstang’. Mr Taylor urged councillors to ‘think outside the box’ with the recommendations that they might decide to make.

Cllr Brooks thanked Mr Taylor for his open and forthright approach, and for his valuable contribution to the task group’s review.

**TM.32  Date and time of next meeting**

To be advised.