

## **CULTURAL PROVISION REVIEW GROUP**

**22 April 2014**

**PRESENT** – Councillors Cossins, Harman, Lawton, Long (in the Chair), EA Richmond and Wright.

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Baldwin, Carson and L Hughes.

**OFFICERS** – Steve Petch, Lead Officer, Place Scrutiny Committee, Stephen Wiper, Creative Darlington Manager, Mike Crawshaw, Head of Culture and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Councillor Wallis, Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio Holder.

**Purpose of the Meeting** – The Chair advised the Group that the current Quad of Aims had outgrown its purpose and an amended Quad of Aims was circulated in light of recent MTFP decisions. The Group were also advised that it would be beneficial to bring the Review to a close once the outcome of funding applications for Theatre Hullabaloo and the Civic Theatre were known.

### **Points Discussed and Considered -**

#### **Head of Steam**

- Mike Crawshaw gave a position statement on the Head of Steam and advised the Group that John Anderson, Assistant Director, Economic Initiative was now the overall project lead which had a focus on regeneration around the Heritage Campus.
- It was stated that A1 Trust, who had recently announced it was building a replica of Steam Locomotion named P2, was a key partner of the Heritage Campus. The Trust had raised more money than expected and at road shows in Edinburgh, York and London had reiterated its commitment to build at £5m steam engine in Darlington by 2021.
- Particular reference was made to the Heritage Campus development including a bigger engine workshop and the desire to purchase land in the Whessoe Road area to ensure greater access for the servicing of engines which was considered a possible income stream. A similar arrangement took place at Barrow Hill and its preserved Roundhouse in Chesterfield and was run by Barrow Hill Engine Shed Society, a group of dedicated rail enthusiasts who rescued the place from dereliction in 1991 from British Rail, who had no further use for the buildings and nearby railway yards.
- The Group were also informed that no business model had been formulated as yet but negotiations were on-going with Heritage Rail, Darlington Railway Preservation Society (DRPS), the North Eastern Locomotion Preservation Group and model railway partners who had resurrected the Darlington Railway Museum

## Trust

- The Friends of the Museum and DRPS had many ideas for the Museum Trust and the value of the Town's Railway Heritage had been awakened with focus on the 2025 Railway Celebrations and possible regeneration of the whole of the North Road area.
- Group were keen to include the buildings within the Town Centre Fringe and the link to Barclays Bank as part of the Heritage with possible links to Shildon and York. Group were pleased to learn that there were workshop availabilities for Creative Darlington.
- A Member expressed concerns that television documentaries on railway heritage concentrated on Liverpool and Manchester with little mention of Locomotion 1 and Darlington and Stockton railways. Darlington hadn't invested, promoted or celebrated its railway heritage and had a lot of catching up to do. The infrastructure of the railways was important and the Museum was good at outlining that.
- In order to give more publicity to Darlington's Railway Heritage a member suggested that a dining and sleeping car be hired, stationed in Head of Steam and overnight packages be offered for 'the experience of the railway'. It was also suggested that students could be employed to provide the catering although there was acceptance that Tourism Operators would be needed and feasibility studies undertaken
- Members were keen for Darlington Railway Station to promote the celebrations and advertise 'Darlington – Home of the Railways' and it was accepted that although there was some history boards they were not in plain view for all to see.
- The Cabinet Member with the Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio stated that there was no central budget that could be utilised for promotion purposes. He did, however, advise that discussions were on-going with Stockton on Durham in relation to the 2025 celebrations and it was important to include York and Shildon within the celebrations. The stressed that these were international celebrations and work was on-going on the basis that solutions would be found. There were some very ambitious ideas that needed to be promoted and Officers were investigating how this could be achieved. He accepted that, although there was a lot going on in the background, more could have been done in past years to promote Darlington's Railway Heritage. A1 Trust was integral to the ambition to have live steam in Darlington.
- A Member suggested that a step back be taken and the Town challenges be looked at. Nowhere was Railway Heritage written down and there was a lot to consider such as cost, contribution to the economy and aspirations. There was no vision for exploiting Darlington's history and heritage. If the vision was framed people would be more willing to buy in.
- Members discussed the formulation of a strategy and in doing so agreed that 2025 provided massive opportunities for Darlington but a decision has to be made on what was wanted for 2025. People on site and in the Town Hall were

involved and had to say what was desired prior to formulating a strategy, it was suggested that Cummins apprentices be asked to build a replica engine as Railway Heritage was essential for Darlington.

- It was stressed that by 2015 there would be zero subsidy for the Head of Steam and a solution had to be sought and that part of the conundrum was to have partners running Head of Steam with consideration also being given to the Heritage Campus. A1 Trust not only shared Darlington's vision and had similar sites, they had ideas and contacts they could share. Darlington had to look forward and understand the strategy for the site, question its identity and think of the message it wished to convey to tourists. There was a need to work in collaboration with Stockton and not compete with it.
- The Group agreed that a long-term vision had to be secured and an analysis done of what Darlington had to offer and where it sat in relation to its competitors. Members were also mindful of the economic climate and the value of volunteers.
- An Officer stated that Darlington had the product but it didn't support the brand, the week-to-week experience of the Head of Steam was for rail enthusiasts and event were family organisations enjoyed by all.
- It was suggested that 'walks' could be mapped to railway links around Darlington such as the £5 Bridge, Barclays Bank, West Brook Villas etc however Members were reminded that the focus was on the bigger picture.
- A further suggestion was to provide signage at various points on the railway lines and around Darlington highlighting the Town's Railway Heritage and points of interest.

## **The Bridge**

- Stephen Wiper advised the Group that The Bridge provided a vibrant community-led venue to support artists and encourage visual arts involvement for Darlington with many artists who were at the Arts Centre now located at the Bridge. He advised that The Bridge had recently passed its first full financial year and volunteer and community groups had gained some funding. He advised the volunteers were passionate about the arts and not necessarily the building they were in.
- The Bridge had generated income of approximately £23k, some from Council funding and some from rent and fees and the garden space had recently been improved.
- It was stated that the Council had encouraged The Bridge to develop a sustainable approach and to use income from hires and events to offset services required to operate the venue and that the feeling was positive, although challenging.
- The Group were reminded of the passion of the many volunteer groups in Darlington for all cultural activities and that a need had to be demonstrated

before the service was asked for.

### **Cockerton Library**

- The Cabinet Member advised the Group that a Task Group of Councillors, representing the immediate area, had been formed and several meetings with Officers had taken place. Best practice was being looked at and community groups, including Age Concern and eVolution, had been involved.
- It was also stated that Community run libraries were Council supported but Darlington was unable to do that. It was expected that a community group or business would run Cockerton Library and link to the Crown Street Library for professional support.
- The meetings had been positive and it was hoped that a solution would be found in Autumn. The Cabinet Member also advised that eVolution had contacted volunteer groups asking if they wished to be involved and what level of expertise they could provide.
- The Group were advised that a possible resolution could be established in the near future and a public consultation exercise would then follow.

**IT WAS AGREED** – (a) That Officers continue to investigate how to promote ideas for the 2025 Railway celebrations.

(b) That the Council continue to look forward and understand the strategy for the Head of Steam site and contemplate the message it wished to convey to tourists.

(c) That a long-term vision be secured and an analysis done of what Darlington had to offer and where it sat in relation to its competitors.

(d) That the provision of signage at various points on the railway lines and around Darlington highlighting the Town's Railway Heritage and points of interest be investigated.

(e) The Group note the success of the Bridge and look forward to its continuation.

(f) The Group look forward to receiving updates in relation to the Cockerton Library.

(g) That a meeting of this Group be held when the outcome of funding applications for Theatre Hullabaloo and the Civic Theatre are known.