

Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Date: 2 September 2015

Agenda item: 6

Wards: All

Subject: Creating a Tourist Industry in Merton - Briefing Paper

Lead officer: Simon Williams

Lead member: Councillor Nick Draper

Contact officer: Anthony Hopkins

Recommendations:

- A. That the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel consider this briefing paper and decide whether a more in-depth task group review is required.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The London Borough of Merton has attractions of national and local interest from the world renowned Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships to the remains of Merton Priory on Merantun Way.
- 1.2. As a host borough of the London 2012 Olympics and with new attractions being developed it is an opportunity for members to consider whether more could be done to realise the economic benefits of tourism in the borough. Areas to consider include considering any infrastructure issues that prevent Merton from being a destination of choice.
- 1.3. The central hub of tourism in Merton is Wimbledon and in particular for the annual Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships. The Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships bring in an additional 25% of visitors to the town centre (*source: Love Wimbledon*) for the fortnight of the championships.
- 1.4. Visits to the borough throughout the rest of the year tend to be for business rather than leisure. In terms of visits to other attractions it is the perception that the majority of visits are either from Merton residents or from those who live in close proximity as opposed to overseas tourists. Limited statistical information is available on tourism activity in the borough and the GLA is currently in the process of developing a Cultural Tourism Strategy in partnership with London & Partners.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. Tourism is travel for recreation, leisure, religious, family or business purposes, usually for a limited duration. Tourism is commonly associated with international travel, but may also refer to travel to another place within the same country. The World Tourism Organisation defines tourists as people "traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for

not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes".

- 2.2. Tourism in the United Kingdom is one of the six biggest industries and the third-largest export earner. The focus of national tourism is outlined in the DCMS's 'Government Tourism' published in 2012. Regionally a 'London Tourism Strategy' is being put together in 2015/16 by the GLA. Members need to consider whether a Merton task group review could add value to what is being developed elsewhere.
- 2.3. Merton's Economic Development Strategy acknowledged tourism opportunities in the borough linked to Wimbledon but it was not reflected as a growth area. Tourism in the borough includes domestic tourism for day visits and overnight travel, inbound leisure visits (i.e. as part of overseas touring parties) and business travel.
- 2.4. The borough is focussed around five town centres: Colliers Wood, Mitcham, Morden, Raynes Park and Wimbledon. They are all primarily residential areas, each with their own commercial and shopping centres. People are entertained by theatres, cinemas, greyhound racing, football teams, the international tennis tournament, and cricket played on the world's oldest cricket green at Mitcham.
- 2.5. As tourism has not been identified as a significant growth area resources have gone into areas such as developing business interests and inward investment. A new Inward Investment and Business Growth Strategy is currently being developed and should be ready in approximately 6 months. The London Borough of Merton currently has no dedicated resources to support tourism and work is picked up through other work such as the borough's Heritage Strategy.
- 2.6. Current tourism activity focusses around the work of Love Wimbledon. Their work includes the establishment of an information point on the top floor of the Centre Court shopping centre that distributes information. A similar offer is also available across public libraries. Love Wimbledon has also produced a map of Wimbledon detailing the hospitality and leisure offer.
- 2.7. **Attractions**
- 2.8. International awareness of the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships is supported by greater awareness of Merton Priory, which is seeking UNESCO world heritage status.
- 2.9. There are 4 registered museums in the borough:
 - All England Lawn Tennis Museum
 - Wandle Industrial Museum
 - Wimbledon Society Museum of Local History
 - Wimbledon Windmill
- 2.10. Along with 3 historic sites:
 - Southside House, Grade II* visitor attraction
 - National Trust, Morden Hall / Watermeads

- Merton Abbey Mills

2.11. **Hotels, Restaurants and Leisure**

2.12. There are 257 hotel, restaurant and leisure firms operating in the borough. Visiting accommodation is centred on Wimbledon and other areas within close proximity of Wimbledon town centre.

2.13. Wimbledon has a number of popular theatres including the New Wimbledon Theatre and the Polka Children's Theatre.

2.14. Merton has a number of sporting accolades. Wimbledon Football Club is the only team in modern times to have enjoyed F.A. Cup glory at both amateur and professional level.

2.15. Mitcham has one of the oldest surviving cricket grounds and the borough continues to host the world-famous Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championship that was the scene of Andy Murray's successful gold medal achievement in the 2012 Olympics.

2.16. **Transport**

2.17. Merton has seven train stations, five tube stations and a network of bus services across the borough. The Tramlink also connects a large proportion of the borough together. With the proposed introduction of Crossrail 2 transport connections are expected to improve along with population growth.

2.18. **Famous People**

2.19. Merton has been home to many famous names, from naval hero Lord Nelson, to anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce; suffragette Rose Lamartine Yates and the eminent engineer Joseph Bazalgette. The borough has also fostered a host of creative talent including the poet, John Donne, author Edna O'Brien; actor, George Cole and pioneering silent filmmakers, George Cricks, Henry Sharp and John Martin.

2.20. **Architecture**

2.21. Architecturally there are many interesting and historic buildings across the borough including the Buddhapadipa Temple in Wimbledon and The Canons in Mitcham.

2.22. **Parks and recreation grounds**

2.23. Merton is rich with green spaces, with over 60 green spaces and is the second greenest borough in London. Significant open space includes Wimbledon Common, Morden Hall Park, Mitcham Common and Canon Hill Common.

2.24. The Wandle Valley Regional Park is in the process of being established. Stretching along the River Wandle from Croydon and Sutton through Merton and Wandsworth to the Thames it connects a network of green spaces that are rich in history.

2.25. The Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust was established in 2012 and is now a registered charity. The partners believe a charitable company is the best business model to allow the regional park to grow over the next three to five years to create a high-quality environment that will help bring jobs, growth and prosperity to the Wandle Valley.

2.26. **Events**

2.27. There are a number of events held in Merton that have significant local interest and ambition to expand including Wimbledon Bookfest, Merton Abbey Fest and the Wimbledon International Music Festival.

2.28. **Nature Reserves**

2.29. 14 sites have been declared as local nature reserves (LNRs) and work continues with English Nature to identify new LNRs. The focus is on land recognised as being of importance for nature conservation interest, with open access for the public and either existing or potential value for environmental education.

3 OPTIONS

- a) Commission a task force group review to look at whether tourism could be developed in the borough by engaging with key stakeholders.
- b) Feed into the review of tourism in London commissioned by the GLA and consider its findings first. The report is expected to be released in early 2016.
- c) Continue to enable current tourism activity to take place and monitor key activities through the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel through other work streams such as the Economic Development Board and Heritage & Design Working Group.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. This report has been produced in conjunction with key Council services that play a role in supporting tourism in the borough. The Chamber of Commerce and Love Wimbledon have also provided input.
- 4.2. Any commissioned task group review would need to include these stakeholders along with consideration for bringing in representatives from hoteliers, transport providers and groups responsible for major attractions in the borough.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. Timetable to be agreed subject to the decisions made by the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel on the options outlined in section 3.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The London Borough of Merton currently places no direct investment into tourism in the borough but supports infrastructure through a variety of different methods.

- 6.2. Love Wimbledon is a Business Improvement District (BID). It has been set up by the shops and offices in Wimbledon with the aim of making the town centre a better place to visit, shop and work in.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. None identified.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. None identified.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None identified.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. None identified.

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- None included.

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1. DCMS Tourism Strategy 2012
- 12.2. Government Tourism Policy 2011
- 12.3. Strategic Framework for Tourism in England (2010-2020)
- 12.4. London Borough of Merton Economic Development Strategy 2012
- 12.5. London Borough of Merton Heritage Strategy

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