

meeting COUNTY COUNCIL

date 22nd September 2011

agenda item number **7a vi.**

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

REPORT FOR THE PERIOD 1 JULY 2011 – SEPTEMBER 2011

1. The following are summaries of work relating to my portfolio. This report reflects the wide range of initiatives being undertaken, all of which help improve and enhance the quality of life for Nottinghamshire people.

Country Parks and Green Estate Services

Sherwood Forest

2. The 27th Robin Hood Festival took place at Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre from 10 to 14 August, and attracted some 19,000 visitors, with income of approximately £124,000 generated.
3. The event was opened by the Chairman of the County Council Councillor Keith Walker and closed by the former Chairman, Councillor Tom Pettengell. This year in response to budget priorities, the Festival was condensed to five days instead of the usual seven. However, careful programming ensured that all the most popular acts and entertainments were on offer, including jousting, falconry and medieval music. The visitor response was overwhelmingly supportive and positive and plans are already in hand for the 2012 Festival which will be taking place during the week 13 - 19 August.
4. A further grant of £10,000 from Lafarge Landfill will enable us to refurbish the aging children's playground at Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre, which is now in urgent need of repair. The equipment, which will comprise simple vandal proof timber items for age group 4-8, is capable of being resited in the future when the new Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre is built.

Rufford Abbey Country Park

5. During August Rufford Abbey was pleased to be awarded a grant of £30,000 from the local Short Breaks programme, which aims to enable more disabled children and young people to access short holidays and days out. The money will be spent on adapting our existing toilet facilities area into a specially adapted

"Changing Places" toilet. This will enable greater use of the park by families of severely disabled children and adults, who require such specialist services. Works should begin in January 2012 and be completed by March 2012.

6. Rufford Abbey Country Park held its annual Living History Weekend on 10/11 September, on the theme of the 1940's. Costumed re-enactors from all over the country came to portray life "On the Home Front 1939-45", in an event which combines entertainment and family fun with learning and serious history.

Bestwood Country Park

7. The Winding Engine House, which was restored in 2010 with monies from the County Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund, welcomed visitors every Saturday morning through the summer. This historic building is opened and staffed by the Winding Engine House community volunteer group. In July, I am delighted to report that our submission for the "PIQAS" (Places of Interest Quality Assurance Scheme) run by Visit England, the English national tourist board was approved. This particular scheme is specially designed for smaller visitor attractions which are community managed or have limited opening hours. The site is now authorised to display the PIQAS quality mark. The volunteer group, led by local former mining engineer Bob Gow, was delighted to have their hard work nationally recognised. A visit by the Chairman of the County Council to present their award is being arranged for later in the autumn.

Southwell Library Poetry Festival

8. The 2011 Southwell Library Poetry Festival took place from 3 to 9 July, encompassing a wide range of events. Highlights included renowned poet Simon Armitage who performed in Southwell Minster, a lively evening of Jazz and Poetry at the library with John Harvey, and a fantastic children's event with poet Brian Moses. Over a thousand tickets were sold, with attendees travelling from across Nottinghamshire and beyond, and the festival received excellent feedback.

Summer Reading Challenge 2011

9. This year's Summer Reading Challenge launched at Worksop and Newark Libraries on Saturday 16 July. In Worksop over 150 children enjoyed two performances of 'Alice in Wonderland' by the Company of Storytellers. Over 85 children attended a performance by poet, Paul Cookson at Newark. Other storytelling events have been held in other libraries throughout the summer. All events have helped ensure an excellent response to children signing up to the Challenge across the county; with our busiest libraries signing up over 500 children each. The Challenge runs until 10 September.

Economic Development

Workclubs

10. I am pleased to report that work clubs are operating in Worksop, Sutton and Kirkby libraries and that one is to start in the Bowbridge School in Newark's Hawtonville Estate in the autumn. The first jobs have been secured through the Worksop Work Club and this club is planning its first Jobs Fair to be held in late September. A Nottinghamshire Work Clubs website has been set up which has details of all of the voluntary work clubs across the County, along with company pledges to support them (<http://www.nccesb.org.uk/nottinghamshire-work-clubs-introduction/>).

Local Broadband Plan

11. I can report that Nottinghamshire has been given an indicative allocation of £4.25 million for its BD:UK broadband project. This is subject to the County Council and its partners agreeing a Local Broadband Plan with the Government. This plan is being drafted by officers in the Economic Development team supported by officers from other service areas including IT.
12. The recent consultation with residents, businesses and community groups who have limited or no broadband access resulted in over 2,000 responses. This will help us to build a case for more funding. Work is underway on the phasing of the works that will be required to bring access to high speed broadband to the most isolated communities and to secure match funding for the programme as BD:UK will only fund up to 50% of the total cost of the new infrastructure.

Nottingham Post Company of the Year

13. Along with the Leader, Deputy Leader and Councillor Keith Girling, I attended the 25th Anniversary of the Nottingham Post Company of the Year awards in early July. I am pleased to report that Synseal won the Company of the Year 2011 award. This award was jointly sponsored by Nottinghamshire County Council and KPMG. Synseal is the largest UK owned PVC systems business and employs 500 people in Huthwaite. Profiles manufactured by Synseal can be found in windows, doors and conservatories in homes across the country. The business has plans to increase its turnover by developing export markets. Synseal maintains its manufacturing edge by investing up to £4million per year in improving its plant, its people and by embracing innovation and developing new ideas. Despite the recent difficult economic conditions the business has increased its turnover and created employment opportunities whilst demonstrating the creativity and talent present in Nottinghamshire's business community. Members of the Cabinet will be visiting the company later in September.

Larger business engagement

14. In his role as the authority's Business Engagement Champion Councillor Keith Girling officially opened the new freezer facility at Caterway's frozen food distribution centre in Huthwaite in July. Founded in 1937 Caterway supplies a range of goods for fast food restaurants and catering establishments. The new facility opened following an increase in business over the past few years which also saw the firm taking on new employees. There are plans to recruit additional staff in the near future.

Business Engagement

15. I am pleased to report that the Nottinghamshire Business Engagement Group, which is chaired by Councillor Keith Girling, celebrated its first anniversary at its meeting of 20 July. The Group has developed to include representatives of the key business membership organisations such as the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses; many of the local business clubs and networks; the business representatives of the D2N2LEP Board and Nottingham City Council.
16. Councillor Keith Girling continues to engage with local businesses through his attendance at business networking meetings and events. These include the larger business clubs such as Newark Business Club to which he gave a presentation on 22 July on County Council procurement and a number of newly established business networks such as the Edwinstowe Business Forum - Councillor Girling attended its inaugural meeting.

Local Authority Procurement

17. Councillor Keith Girling has been leading on work to make sure that as much of our spend on goods and services benefits the Nottinghamshire economy as possible. I can report that during the summer Councillor Girling has met several times with his counterpart from Nottingham City Council, Councillor Nick McDonald, to explore ways in which the two councils can work better together for the benefit of our local companies and supply chains.

Inward Investment

18. The County Council is working on several levels to encourage businesses to move into, or to maintain their Nottinghamshire presence. As part of this process, the Council has invested resources to extend the remit capacity of Nottingham City Council's inward investment team – "Invest in Nottingham". The purpose of this is to encourage investment and development across the county by widening the geographical benefits of the internationally-recognised "Nottingham" brand.
19. In addition to this, the County Council is also member of the "Invest in Nottingham Club", which is a private sector-led organisation, comprising over one hundred leading local business men and women who share a genuine commitment to the continued growth and prosperity of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. The Club is supported by the Invest in Nottingham team in organising a series of flagship events throughout the year which seek to attract

investors and developers to Nottingham and the county, so that they are aware of the benefits and attractions of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire when they are considering locations for investment or business relocations.

20. The most recent Club event was the “Invest in Nottingham” day, held on the 19 September, which Councillor Keith Girling attended. Around 200 guests attended on the day which included a number of workshops which showcased the particular strengths and opportunities of the local economy, including the recently-designated Enterprise Zone. The programme appeared to be very positively received by guests and the Invest in Nottingham team will seek to build upon the impetus generated by the event to bring further investment and employment to the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire area.

Conservation

Natural Environment White Paper

21. The Government published the Natural Environment White Paper (*The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*) in June with the aim, by 2020 to “halt overall biodiversity loss... and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people”. The Government wants this generation to be the first to leave the natural environment in a better condition than it inherited and the White Paper states that a healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing.
21. My colleague, Councillor Richard Butler, and I can report that the County Council has been working with a range of partners across Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire to address some of the immediate opportunities within the White Paper. A bid to form a Local Nature Partnership (“Peak to Trent”) has been submitted jointly with Derbyshire and the outcome is expected from DEFRA by the end of September. The successful Partnerships will be expected to work at a strategic, landscape scale and to engage with sectors not traditionally involved in the conservation of the natural environment, including economic development and health.
22. A further bid is being submitted to Natural England, on behalf of partners in Nottinghamshire, for Sherwood to be one of the 12 proposed pilot Nature Improvement Areas sharing a total funding pot of £7.5 million. If this bid is successful it will enable local authorities, local communities, civil society and land owners to come together to plan and deliver significant improvements for wildlife and people through the sustainable use of natural resources, restoring and creating wildlife habitats, connecting local sites and joining up local action.

Metal Theft

23. Unfortunately I have to report that metal theft, and particularly lead theft from some of our County’s historic buildings, is a significant and increasing problem in Nottinghamshire and nationally. The County Council is working with a number of

key organisations such as English Heritage and the Diocesan Advisory Committee, as well as with individual churches and building owners, to find solutions to this growing problem. These solutions will address prevention as well as restoration of damage. Members may be interested to note that an e-petition has been created, calling for an amendment to the Scrap Metal Merchants Act 1964 to prohibit cash transactions (<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/406>). It is believed that this would be a significant step towards reducing metal theft.

Heritage Open Days

24. The County Council has worked with colleagues in the City Council and Experience Nottinghamshire to promote and support the Heritage Open Days organised by our local Civic Societies. Heritage Open Days is a national scheme that runs in September every year and celebrates England's historic environment by offering free access to properties that are usually closed to the public or normally charge for admission. Between the 8 and 11 of September members of the public were able to enjoy events and tours of some of Nottinghamshire's heritage gems, ranging from the heritage barge in Newark to the Hurt's Factory framework knitting machines in Chilwell and the Majestic Theatre in Retford.

Buildings at Risk

25. I can report that, of the 3765 listed buildings in Nottinghamshire, 241 (6.4%) are currently deemed to be "at risk" through deterioration or neglect. This represents a small overall decrease in the total number of buildings at risk but the figures also include a number of buildings which have only recently been added to the register. With new buildings being added to the register, achieving an overall decrease is testament to the dedicated efforts of the County Council in working with building owners, other local authorities and English Heritage to ensure that buildings are restored and removed from the "at risk" register.
26. One such building is King John's Palace in Kings Clipstone where the remains of this important part of our county's heritage and link to historic Sherwood have been secured and made accessible. The County Council was instrumental in securing English Heritage funding of £85,000, matched by a contribution of £21,000 through its Local Improvement Scheme. The importance of King John's Palace has been highlighted by a recent visit from the BBC's Time Team and the resulting programme is likely to be screened later in the autumn.

Greenwood Community Awards

27. On Wednesday 24 August 2011, I joined Colin Barson, Chair of the Friends of Greenwood Community Forum, and over 130 guests at the Greenwood Community Awards. This annual Awards ceremony is a major celebration of the environmental work carried out by individual volunteers and groups working towards the creation of Greenwood, Nottinghamshire's Community Forest. Awards were presented on the night to volunteers from all areas of Greenwood who were of all ages and abilities. I am pleased to report that volunteers at three

sites owned or managed by Nottinghamshire County Council, Bestwood Country Park, Moor Pond Wood and Tippings Wood, picked up four of the awards. Members may also be interested to know that the School Involvement Award was presented to Vicky Howarth, a Teaching Assistant at King Edward's Primary School in Mansfield. She encourages and supports the children in planting and caring for flower and vegetable gardens, including a small, quiet garden planted in memory of the late Councillor Tom Appleby.

Breath of Fresh Air Project (BOFA)

28. BOFA is an East Midlands partnership aiming to deliver a range of cultural activities promoting a deeper understanding of environmental sustainability, health and well-being. Eleven of the region's green spaces, nature reserves and heritage sites are encouraging people to get active, take pleasure in their local natural environment, volunteer and learn new skills.
29. I am pleased to report that Vicar Water Country Park in Clipstone, was chosen as one of the 11 sites and that Greenwood Community Forest has been working in partnership with Groundwork and Newark & Sherwood District Council on a project designed to involve the whole community.
30. The Greenwood team led workshops in July with pupils from Whynddale and Newlands Primary Schools, located in the vicinity of Vicar Water Country Park. The project culminated in a giant "crocodile" walk at Vicar Water Fun Day on Sunday 4 September to celebrate and raise awareness of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Time Travel Trent Vale – Newark Castle

31. On the 30 July, the County Council organised the Time Travel Trent Vale event at Newark Castle. This free event was part of the Festival of British Archaeology, an annual celebration of British archaeology, and the Trent Vale Landscape Partnership, a 3-year Heritage Lottery funded project which aims to conserve, enhance and celebrate the cultural identity of the Trent Vale between Newark and Gainsborough.
32. Around 4000 visitors enjoyed medieval sword fights, musket firing and weaponry displays, mixed with soldiers from World War II and visitors were given access to areas of the castle not normally open to the general public, such as the deep dungeons and castle towers. The County Council's Community Archaeologists and volunteers were on hand to explain the history of the castle.

The event was attended by Councillor Sue Saddington and the Deputy Mayor for Newark, Councillor Irene Brown.

Monspool Excavation – Festival of British Archaeology

33. I am pleased to report that the County Council has been able to provide another opportunity for members of the public to take part in an archaeological

excavation during the Festival of British Archaeology. Between the 8 and 19 of August, an estimated 178 volunteers got their hands dirty digging and recording features at Monspool, near Besthorpe, a site which was occupied from prehistory into Roman times. The Community Archaeologists provided on-site training in archaeological techniques and also organised workshops so that volunteers could learn about pottery and other artefacts from specialists.

Graveyard recording

34. The Community Archaeologists have been working with Awsworth and Cossall History Society to map the graveyard at St Peter's Church, Awsworth. Volunteers recorded where each grave was located, the size and general state of the headstone and any wording on it. This information can be used in future by people studying genealogy and for researching family trees.

COUNCILLOR JOHN COTTEE

Cabinet Member for Culture and Community

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