

market town welcome

Market Town Welcome Destination Plan for Chester-le-Street

July 2010



“Chester-le-Street - a great north market town, home of the Emirates Durham International Cricket Ground and proud of its Christian heritage”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Extracted from the Destination Plan for Chester-le-Street which was produced by Alison Caffyn

Visit County Durham



Chester-le-Street Destination Development Plan

Executive Summary

The Destination Plan for Chester-le-Street sets out agreed common priorities for developing and promoting Chester-le-Street as a destination. It is designed to be a working document that can be added to as the town and its partners identify new opportunities for development and is intended to steer a way forward over the next 5-10 years (2010 – 2020).

The Destination Plan was produced by Alison Caffyn, Research Consultant, who was commissioned using joint funding from Durham County Council's Chester-le-Street AAP Area Budget and Regeneration Economic Development. Alison used the Market Town Welcome template which has been developed to be as inclusive as possible, working with a local group in each town which includes tourism businesses, local groups and organisations as well as the local authorities and Visit County Durham. Various methods were used to help structure the plan including:

- An audit of the tourism resources in and around the town
- A survey of local visitor facing businesses
- A review of all local strategies and plans which the Destination Plan needs to link into and complement.
- Three workshops were held and attended by a wide range of local businesses and partners involved in tourism. The attendees discussed the key elements of this plan, the target markets, the vision for Chester-le-Street as a destination and identified and prioritised the action points.

The vision for Chester-le-Street is:

By 2020 Chester-le-Street will be renowned as a great north market town, home of the Durham Emirates Cricket Ground and proud of its Christian heritage.

With Beamish Museum, St Cuthbert's Church, the Anker's House and Lumley Castle visitors will be drawn to discover Chester-le-Street's fascinating history; from Roman times through to recent social and mining heritage and its important place in the Northern Saints Trail. The more modern attractions of the International Cricket Ground set beside the beautiful River Wear and the scenic Riverside Park are great venues for relaxing and events. The town is an attractive and convenient base for exploring the wider Durham and Newcastle areas.

The purpose of the plan is to:

- Develop the tourism potential of Chester-le-Street and strengthen its identity for visitors.
- Provide a framework and rationale for investment and development planning in the tourism sector within the town.
- Identify priority actions

- Clarify how partners and agencies can work together to deliver the destination plan.

The objectives of the Destination Development Plan are:

1. To strengthen and promote Chester-le-Street's identity as a visitor destination for heritage, events and sports lovers and for those needing an attractive and convenient base from which to explore Durham and Newcastle.
2. To build on the reputation and future development of key attractions such as the International Cricket Ground, Lumley Castle and Beamish Museum to encourage more visitors and better links to the town centre.
3. To develop a sustainable, year round visitor economy offering excellent service, quality food and drink, enjoyable events and value for money; generating repeat visits.
4. To better promote and enable visitors to enjoy Chester-le-Street's heritage particularly its unique Christian heritage and integrate this within the wider Durham and North East heritage offer.
5. To invest in town centre environmental and infrastructural improvements to improve linkages between the Riverside and Front Street, clear visitor signposting, maps, coach parking and support facilities such as toilets.
6. To increase the volume and range of quality accommodation, retail and food and drink offers in the town to meet future visitor demand, including the town markets.
7. To attract more visitors by organising and hosting events, competitions and promoting local heritage, sport and culture, working with venues such as the International Cricket Ground.
8. To encourage more visitors to walk and cycle around the town and to explore the riverside, local countryside and nature reserves.
9. To encourage existing businesses to continue to invest in their properties and services and to encourage new business investment in the town.
10. To encourage and support collaboration between local organisations and businesses to enable joint delivery of the destination plan actions.

The Strategy:

Chester-le-Street has some good visitor attractions and facilities. However these need to be better joined up both with good information and physical links, and then promoted more strongly. Plus improvements to the environment of the town centre would help the town support a stronger visitor economy. This would then support a significant increase in visitor accommodation provision.

In order to deliver the plan's objectives Chester-le-Street needs to invest providing better information in both print and web based formats, particularly good quality maps of the town

centre and riverside – showing people the two or three key routes between the town and the river. These routes deserve some investment in upgrading the physical environment – removing any eyesores, good signage and planting. Encouraging more people to move between town and riverside will extend their stays and encourage more spending and return visits.

To support this central theme other areas of the town's tourism product need improving or extending such as the accommodation stock, car parking and the retail offer. In order to make Chester-le-Street work better as a destination, visitors need to find parking easily, then find their way around with a good map and signage, feeling safe and enjoying an attractive streetscape with well maintained frontages. Chester-le-Street has particular opportunities to link in with some of the region's highest profile destinations – Beamish, Durham City and Christian sites – and attract more visitors through collaboration with these. One of the main challenges will be to sell the town to its own business and resident community – many of whom do not currently rate it as a visitor destination. By encouraging local buy-in, ownership and pride, the whole town may be able to gear up better as a destination and businesses may identify a range of opportunities themselves.

Chester-le-Street Destination Key Projects:

1. New visitor map based leaflet
2. Joined up promotion
3. Visitor web pages for Chester-le-Street
4. Visitor map boards
5. Review car parking strategy
6. Resolve and promote coach parking
7. Identify and improve key visitor routes
8. Make more of the town's Christian Heritage
9. Establish a town heritage hub/centre
10. Additional visitor accommodation

Taking the Plan Forward

In order to implement the plan it is essential that there is a local leadership group in place. They will be able to champion the plan, ensure that the plan is understood amongst all partners and sectors and will be able to contribute to the plan themselves. Their role will be to co-ordinate implementation by partners and monitor progress. They may also be directly involved in implementing some of the actions not being taken forward by others. They should also co-ordinate communication about the Plan and celebrate the successes as actions are completed.

The role of the leadership group may be able to be taken on by an existing group in the town, or a specific sub-group. This may require the strengthening of existing groups for example by recruiting more representatives from tourism businesses or organisations and widening communications e.g. to include owners of key attractions. Where a group does not currently exist, one will need to be established.

It is important to keep the focus on the town as a destination and the visitor throughout.

1.1 Chester-le-Street Destination Plan – Action Plan

Actions shaded in blue are key projects and are described in more detail in section 6.3 below.

1	Marketing, promotion and information provision	Priority	Timescale	How and who?
1.1	New visitors map based leaflet about CLS focusing on agreed USPs, to be racked alongside other market town leaflets and held in local hotels, caravan sites, at Riverside, all Durham TICs, Beamish and in Newcastle/Gateshead/Washington TICs and key attractions.	VH	QW-S	VCD subject to funding
1.2	Joined up promotion – improve links to other areas and work with neighbouring authorities to combine the tourism offer. Contact key websites to improve info on CLS and CLS businesses eg tripadvisor, This is Durham, Visit NE England. Work with Visit County Durham and ONE to improve profile of CLS in brochures and leaflets. Ensure key attractions eg Lumley Castle, Riverside and Beamish promote their CLS location, the town and its USPs by displaying leaflets, mounting town maps on the wall, website links, staff familiarisation and explore scope to link the town into their events. Link more to other Christian sites – Durham, Bede’s World, Jarrow, Lindisfarne, Finchale Priory – reciprocal leaflets on display and web links. Make more of two nearby National Trust sites Penshaw Monument and Moorhouse Woods – ask NT to raise their profile on website and in handbook.	VH	QW-S	DCC, VCD, Durham attractions group, Heritage Group and church, new tourism group
1.3	Visitor webpages for CLS – on key attractions/USPs, links to accommodation and attraction websites; events listing; downloadable street map, heritage trail, walks and cycle routes; good transport info and reciprocal weblinks.	VH	QW-S	VCD, AAP, new tourism group
1.4	Visitor map boards - more boards in key locations eg market square, library and main car parks and update some older ones eg at Riverside (In addition to	VH	QW-S	VCD

	new ones planned at station and Front Street)			
1.5	Visitor information in town - Better source of info leaflets and advice eg at library – may require additional maps, racking, staff training and better sign or map board on exterior wall	H	S	VCD, DCC
1.6	Promote the town to coach companies for stop offs. Once parking and toilet provision agreed - working through coach company contacts and group travel organisations. (possibly scope to work with particular pub(s) re drop off, food and toilet provision – eg Red Lion)	H	M	DCC transport David Holding
1.7	Promote train, bus and coach options for travel to CLS and good accessibility info on all info sources, ie leaflets, web pages.	H	S	DCC transport

1.8	Visitor survey – undertake a thorough survey of visitors to CLS to monitor likes, dislikes, characteristics etc and scope out demand for key facilities – ideally every 3 years.	M	M	VCD, DCC, ONE, DCCC

2.	Town environment	Priority	Timescale	How and who?
2.1	<p>Review car parking strategy – incorporating visitor perspective, lengths of stay, levels of charge. Introduce an all day rate and a ticket which can be used in all car parks - in town and riverside.</p> <p>Improve signing for car parks on the basis of the review – with more signing for those prioritised for visitors.</p> <p>Locate a town map highlighting key pedestrian routes and other car parks in these main car parks.</p>	VH	QW-S	DCC, AAP
2.2	<p>Resolve and promote coach parking - establish and sign several coach parking spaces in good central location</p>	VH	QW-S	DCC
2.3	<p>Identify and improve key visitor routes from Front Street to the riverside and sign and improve the appearance of these – linked to car park review (2.1). May require better or upgraded crossing points. Include in map (1.1 And 1.4) (signing to Riverside underway along Ropery Walk so look at two other routes – one from centre and one from market place – using underpass) Widen underpass and install better lighting</p>	VH	QW-S	DCC
2.4	<p>New toilets in market place (or expand existing disabled toilet or an arrangement with a local business?)</p>	H	S/M	DCC
2.5	<p>Environmental improvements and clean up untidy areas around the town and riverside park – enforcement against particular eyesores?</p>	H	QW-M	DCC, Traders Association
2.6	<p>Floral displays, or decorations/banners, to improve attractiveness of town – build on the ‘in bloom’ competition and recruit more businesses and wider community, e.g. install hanging flower baskets/basket trees along key routes to riverside</p>	H	QW-S	AAP, Traders Assoc, DCC
2.7	<p>Tackle anti-social behaviour, graffiti etc – through pub watch type scheme, liaison between business groups and police, youth centres, organisations etc.</p>	H	S and ongoing	Police, Traders, Licensed

	plus film nights project etc			Victuallers, AAP
2.8	Better signs at station northbound platform to town centre. New promotional signage along platforms eg “CLS for the Riverside Cricket Ground, St Cuthbert’s Church and Lumley Castle”	H	S	Station, AAP, VCD

2.9	Wider and better quality pavements along Front Street to improve accessibility and pedestrian friendly feel	H	M	DCC
2.10	Support development projects from Master Plan e.g. infill development on market place, station approaches environmental improvements, Chester Burn green corridor, shop front improvement scheme.	H	M-L	DCC,
2.11	Design and install new town welcome signs at gateways to the town – with strapline/USPs	M	M	DCC
2.12	Improve war memorial (Of great concern to residents but not high priority for tourism development)	L	M	
2.13	Pilot a shuttle bus route from Front Street to Riverside and riverside park	L	M-L	DCC
3.	Heritage	Priority	Timescale	How and who?
3.1	Make more of the town's Christian Heritage – Promote the Church, Anker's House, highlight the Lindisfarne Gospels, Lumley Warriors, other churches, Cuddy's Corse etc. Plus link to earlier Roman heritage e.g. Great North Road and later town heritage eg mining and industry.	VH	M	Church, DCC, heritage group, new tourism group
3.2	Establish a town heritage hub/centre – space in a centrally located building for displays about the town's history and heritage. Potentially could also act as a TIC. Needs to incorporate storage for Heritage Group resources.	VH	M	Heritage Group, Library/parish centre, DCC, external funding
3.3	Improve links to other NE Christian heritage sites – reciprocal web links, leaflets, cross promotion, training for volunteers, inclusion in county/regional marketing campaigns (see also 1.2).	H	S	Church, Heritage Group, VCD
3.4	Review and update heritage trail – in time for when reprint required, plus load it onto website so can be printed out by visitors in advance	H	S-M	Heritage Group
3.5	Genealogy research – link new CLS webpages (1.3) to Heritage Group	M	M	Heritage Group

	website and have source of info/helpful contacts for people researching their family history.			
3.6	Heritage Open Days - Identify buildings which might be opened on Heritage Open Days eg all the town's historic churches, Harbour House or special events at Civic Centre or St Cuthbert's – work with Durham Group, English Heritage, churches.	M	M	Heritage Group, DCC
4.	Walking, cycling and countryside	Priority	Timescale	How and who?
4.1	Compile 'Walks and Nature around CLS' booklet with suggested walks and info on all the disparate nature reserves: Waldridge Fell Country Park and SSSI, Moorhouse Woods (NT), Cong Burn Wood (local nature reserve), Rainton Meadows Nature Reserve (DWT), Washington Wetland centre (WWT), Brasside Pond, Frankland (DWT), Durham Necklace Park? Start with simple listing of sites on webpage with links. Move on to research and promote walks and compile booklet. Also work with wider campaigns eg 'It's in our nature'.	H	QW-S	DCC, VCD, DWT, local group/volunteer, Ramblers, Heritage Group
4.2	Research and promote cycle routes - a range of different length (circular) routes from the town (Eg through the CPAL get active cycling programme targeting CLS area) – leaflet and/or pdfs on website	H	S/M	DCC and Sustrans
4.3	Open up riverside walk from CLS to Durham – promote Cuddy's Corse route initially but aim for riverside path along whole length. Scope for any other riverside walks?	H	M/L	Northumbrian Assoc, DCC, Ramblers, Durham City Vision
4.4	Develop more cycle friendly environment over time and encourage more visitors to cycle around the town and local countryside eg bike racks, bike hire from accommodation, cycle lanes.	M	L	DCC

5.	Business development	Priority	Timescale	How and who?
5.1	Additional visitor accommodation – Support the development of a new quality mid price hotel at the International Cricket Ground. Compile more data on demand and occupancy.	VH	M	DCC, partners, business investment opp, cricket ground, VCD
5.2	Upgrade pub accommodation - work with existing smaller pubs/inns to upgrade existing rooms, establish websites and promote their general visitor offer. Business support through Business Engagement Team	H	S	Traders Assoc, VCD
5.3	Promote special offers and deals for cricket match/major event days - liaise with Riverside to support wider promotions – pilot and develop in preparation for test match in 2013	H	S/ongoing	Businesses, cricket ground
5.4	Additional support for retail, catering and visitor facing businesses eg website development and upgrading, e-marketing, internet booking and sales systems, graphic design/signage, green tourism, access improvements, customer service, Desti.ne system	H	S-M	Traders Assoc
5.5	Encourage and facilitate business collaboration , such as business to business recommendations and joint working through networking events, familiarisation visits, hosting open days, discount tickets, weblinks, leaflet swaps etc. Perhaps establish an annual Chester-le-Street tourism forum or event/visit to see new facilities etc.	H	S and ongoing	Traders Assoc, VCD
5.6	Attract new good quality retail eg clothing, interiors, gifts,	H	M-L	DCC,
5.7	Encourage new quality B&B accommodation in town centre or farms nearby.	M	S	Traders, VCD
5.8	Re-establish rowing boats on the river – business opportunity?	M	M	DCC
5.9	Reopen miniature railway in riverside park as family attraction and /or	M	M	DCC

	improve the café area, introduce soft play area and have more shelter for poor weather.			
5.10	Make more of local produce and food specialities in local cafes, pubs and restaurants – improve menus and signage eg through Taste Durham	M	L	Businesses,
5.11	Support new attraction/activity developments eg Adventure Valley or Lambton Park. Include major opportunities in Area Tourism Management Plan (ATMaP).	M	M	VCD via ATMaP
6.	Events	Priority	Timescale	How and who?
6.1	Compile events listing for visitors and keep it updated on webpages (1.3).	H	QW and ongoing	DCC, AAP, new tourism group
6.2	Promote existing events more eg regatta, St Cuthbert's Walk, Beamish and Riverside events and organise more PR and media coverage. Establish events network to improve communications and joint working.	H	S	AAP and business community, various
6.3	Support and promote the markets - consolidate market on one or two days?, add in extra themed markets eg French market or more specialist markets, encourage more farmers market stalls – discuss with market traders group, town council etc.	H	S-M	AAP and outside partners and businesses
6.4	More events in town centre and market place linked to town's heritage (also possibly food or music events) – events which link riverside and town centre – eg processions or multi site events? Ideas could include: Heritage - Lumley Warriors in action, re-enactment of town football game, Lambton Worm (re-enactment or worm costume competition or festival); Walking Festival – working with local Ramblers groups; Horticultural/flower festival – working with local allotment associations; Shopping festival – eg pre Christmas with competitions and promotions. Need to research best themes, support and feasibility.	H	S-M	DCC and partners, TCM

6.5	Boost events business - Link with Durham Events Forum, work with other market towns, scope to develop the conference, business, weddings, celebrations market	H	S-M	DCC, Businesses
6.6	Develop music events - Music festival in pubs, local young bands playing in the square and/or big music festival at riverside park/ground	H	S-M	Businesses, AAP, voluntary groups,

Key projects

1. The projects highlighted in blue above are those which will make most difference and which are top priority for this destination plan.

Each project is described in more detail within the Destination Development Plan alongside further background information, statistics and research. To download a full copy go to: <http://www.durham.gov.uk/Pages/Service.aspx?ServiceId=7882>