Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Participants Feedback from Workstream 2 of the Community Plan

Wednesday 14 September 2016

Sustainable Jobs and Developing Tourism Potential

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Facilitator	Is there anything missing from the evidence baseline	What do you feel are the top 3 key strategic priorities for the area?
Hazel Bell	- Domestic Tourist Market – don't have 1% of NI visitors stopping at Visitor Centre in Glenarm – experience is of mainly Independent travellers, European in summer as well as other global travellers. Domestic market is negligible – there is not a reliance on this. - Identity throughout NI has to be improved with each individual town looked at. Policy, appearance, ambience, hospitality – community level improvement. All hospitality service. Each town in the Borough needs its own unique selling point. - Town centres have been destroyed by out of town shopping centres. - Car parking issues – need a drive to revitalise town centres – return focus to centres away from out of town. - Incentive schemes to retain traders, rates discount schemes for investors improving vacant property, improved town centre security to encourage evening economy and town centre living. - Are there tourism/business cluster groups in the Glens – provide opportunities to network and work together. Support for Community Clustering. - Tourism has potential – need to train providers in dealing with visitors. - Gobbins is a 2 hour visit – needs to be marketed as part of a whole day trip and linking to other resources, attractions and services.	- The 'East Coast' Concept – fully rebranded Area/Borough - Mythology – unique selling point and branding. 'Geo – Tourism' has not yet been fully exploited - Technical and Physical Infrastructure – Roads, Broadband - need to define what level of broadband as it has to be fit for purpose to enable future growth. - Improving social skills, town centres. *Lifestyle Enhancement* – for all villages and towns. Socially interesting destinations, also to include lifestyle, fitness, well-being. This is for everyone, not just the tourism market – can't rely on tourists; area needs to be welcoming to residents and potential investors. - Socially welcoming environment. - Effective use of digital marketing - People better prepared and equipped for jobs. - Need Infrastructure to support jobs – business space . - Sustainable, environmentally friendly Infrastructure. - Planning policy to be socially responsible - Options for Community Asset Transfer to retain key services, especially in rural areas.

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	• Dependent on available space in right area and appropriate skills. Evidence to create a more level playing field – ie. a lot of technical skills in Caterpillar in Larne. • Larne has the Port – should be an attraction for export led industry. • Problem is the connection through Scotland to north and to east; need infrastructure on Scottish side of sea crossing. • Group agreed with trying to attract more skills and investment and in general with the baseline information provided. • Move towards business start-up units; market testing of where they should naturally be located. Business has to be in the right place. • Planning – change of use often ruins the viability of towns. • To build on tourism –including other activities that we have ie. yachting, sailing, wildlife, boat trips, walking, surfing etc. – on the east coast. • Proper advertising and marketing of facilities as evident in Scotland. • Glenarm – domestic market accepted but need to capitalise on international visitors. International is here, it's providing for them. • Tourism employment opportunity – need to focus on this for employment and economic growth – but there is not the same value for these jobs in comparison to manufacturing. High value jobs linked to skills. • NI is so small on the world stage • Commuting is a problem, but it is necessary to find employment and to balance quality of life with employment locations due to scale of NI.	

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	• Need to improve the working relationship with Bord Failte/ Failte Ireland – get further benefits. • The branding and identity needs refined ie. a name for the region. • Information needed from Department for Communities – (Historic monuments now have a tourism remit, archaeology aspect) need links and partnerships across all Departments. Castles, History and Legends – further themes, clusters and area to explore.	
Catherine Black	• Best source advice is tourists themselves – more visitor/customer surveys • Grading assessors of accommodation and their knowledge • Tour operators routes and dates and times of visits and stop off points • In relation to economic and education – lack of information from community – Larne and Carrick especially. Lack of community groups especially in disadvantaged communities – grassroots information • NI Craft Industry • Lack of infrastructure related data e.g. Broadband / transport / railways especially N/S and walkways. • Information from young people as future customers / business owners – going beyond community groups to take in views of younger generation both in relation to tourism and economic/education. • Tourism spend? Tourists find it expensive (Europeans) Food/Eating Out costly?	• Increasing level of private sector collaboration with community and voluntary sectors to meet tourism needs. • Addressing educational underachievement, increasing level of education achievement/attainment and making sure education/training providers and meeting the needs of industry – matching skills to jobs. "Build the skills and the jobs will come" • Increasing levels of collaboration between Private Sector and Community/Voluntary Sector with respect to the delivery of economic and tourism products at a local level. Others • Better use / increase use of existing buildings – should not be easier to build new rather than restore and reuse. Better use of what we current assets. • Infrastructure available for all – Broadband.

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	• Not enough good quality tourism accommodation – Golf – not enough beds, people put off coming. B&B sector those who are currently providers retiring, no younger people to plug the gaps. • Package for B&B providers to start up, advice guidance do and don't etc. • Cheaper accommodation (cheaper/safe) hostels, tents, hire cycles. • Campsite reinstatement Islandmagee (relevant to Gobbins) must be operated with a warden in place. • Information on how much business are we turning away – e.g. internet accommodation bookings number of searches etc. • Assistance to Tourism providers to get online presence. • Islandmagee – needs restaurant / pub / infrastructure • Special needs accommodation – special packages • Monopolise on opportunities with Carrickfergus Castle – evidence from tourism/visitor surveys – gather local information. • Educational underachievement – grassroots into disadvantaged areas • Craft Industry – Tourism potential with promotion of local crafts • Infrastructural evidence – Broadband coverage (Wi-Fi) • Information on night-time economy (or lack of) after 5pm – need infrastructural support transport, railway, Port of Larne (underdeveloped potential for Cruise ships) Communication of cruises e.g. Buses – Carrick castle – Tour routes (share this)	• Increased inward investment particularly IT companies. • Education and employment opportunities for all e.g. Young adults disabilities. • NIEA as top go to region with own identity within NI • Full employment – increased GDP • Reduction in economic inactivity. • Tackling dereliction for tourism product – VAT charges on refurbishments of barns/diversifications • Improvement of Broadband • Development for young people / special needs • Improvement in levels of educational attainment – Right Skills Set. • Inward Investment from growth sectors (incentivising investments) • Education Providers focus on meeting the demands of industry. (special needs) • MEA is a top destination for tourism, within the NI Context. • Increase in GDP • Reducing economically inactive.

	• Future Consumers – ask them – school populations – do they know what is available • How Planning Policy stopping investment/redevelopment in the town is centres e.g. Conservation area, Carrickfergus town centre especially West Street (20+years) too costly to redevelop to conservation requirements.	
Gail Kelly	**Tourism** • Coastal route appears to bypass Carrick. Needs more focus and inclusion of local attractions • Percentage of self-catering availability appears to be very low, why? • Breakdown of numbers visiting what Top Attractions in MEA needed **Statistics** • Are quite dated, recent figures needed to assess any change, where we stand now? **Economic** • Statistics on volume of workspace availability, occupancy rate, what type and square footage needed. • Shopping – statistics needed on on-line shopping has this impacted on local spend? • Multi nationals effect on local shops. **Education** • Education Authorities - are they identifying different skills base needed for today, • Is the curriculum matching this? • Should schools/university be gearing towards needs? **Qualifications** • Statistics on skills breakdowns in what area needed.	**Entrepreneurship** • Has to be developed and encouraged further. • Support • Begin with schools • Community Groups • Businesses become more enterprising, • Investment in skills learning **Tourism** • A full package needed which shows Tourism facilities, accommodation, transport, • Clear Branding essential, learn to sell ourselves, • Villages linked with towns with links to local services, • Large events – people pullers, • Attract more jobs in response to inward investment. **Infrastructure** • Sell ourselves – close proximity to Belfast, • Attract inward investment, • Provide facilities to attract more residents. • Broadband availability and capability needed.

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	• Which areas are the skills gap in? • What skills opportunity/shortage are there in the MEA area? **Road infrastructure – A2 & A8** • What are the statistics on the changes, if any, the new roads have brought? • Are there any statistics showing if the towns have grown as commuter belts?	
Jane Dunlop	• Age profile regarding working ages, aging population trends, where are we losing people and why? • Impact of closures of businesses (e.g. JTI or Michelin) on the smaller businesses in the same or similar industries • Need further information on statistics presented on the day – a summary of the baseline details. This was too much information to digest (to not have beforehand) plus the slide quality was poor – very small and largely unreadable • Are local councils & Invest NI involved in the processes with regard to contracts / tendering from local businesses – e.g. Wrightbus – offering assistance when regulations (EU) are restrictive • More information on housing growth and population trends • Capture route causes for people leaving the borough • Information on current / proposed transport infrastructure outside of main towns and into rural areas where this can be limited • More alignment of agriculture and tourism – make them work better together and grow the industry as a whole • Areas of commuting i.e. Carrick – maintain these as area's to live, play and have schools. Not actively	1 – We aim for MEA have the top GVA in the province 2 – A more balanced and diverse economy which is less dependent on one industry 3 – Regenerate infrastructure and housing stocks. Leading to an increase in overall population – 'A good place to live, work and play' Points to note: - Allow for commuting to major cities for example London and return to live in MEA – this appears to be a current trend / should we make better provision for it, as this can sometimes be an opportunity for families to return and life in the area (one parent commutes) - Good infrastructure – technology – wifi / broadband - Balanced economy - Encourage entrepreneurship - Good network links to and from major towns / cities - Retain and bring back our skilled workforce [who moved away] bring them back! - Create good links and joined up working between all stakeholders on a regional basis [from a

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	trying to attract major business investment but concentrate on housing for growth of population happy to live in the suburbs of the main city • Improve building infrastructure in towns to ensure they have the ability to accommodate any growth or new business • Concern about the information being outdated with updated ICT and technology making it difficult to capture data as many bookings & purchases done online • Further information needed on tourist attractions – why are people coming here? What do they want to see? Is there enough availability i.e people coming for a weekend but a lot of attractions are not open on Sundays – feel this should be reviewed / is restrictive • No capture of film industry data (discussion around Game of Thrones industry for NI) • Profile for agriculture – are there projections for this industry? • Problems with the upkeep of attractions/image, they appear untidy e.g. grass being cut • Information on what skills we need for the future and how we plan to provide this	tourism perspective] – MEA Brand important, but needs to join in with the overall NI/Ireland Brand - Include all landmarks / attractions in visitor information packs - Would like to see Zero unemployment in MEA through improved training schemes
Fiona Surgenor	Economic • Interesting fact re level of qualifications. Need this statistic broken down on a geographic basis to determine where to focus efforts. • No social enterprise mentioned. Need things working with and for communities. Need investment in areas. Additional information needed on social enterprises in the area.	1. Infrastructure/Access: direct link to airports and ports from mid and east Antrim is vital to both tourism and economic development; improve public transport links; broadband improvement; set up enterprise zones providing support in terms of training, space. 2. Increase presence on the global market both in terms of tourism and economic opportunity:

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- Getting back to schools/education. Need that link to make things work. Cultural change required in schools to develop self-employment and entrepreneurship as genuine career options in order to grow economy locally. Need to change mind sets. - Need to identify existing activity in these areas, eg Young Enterprise, and build on it. - FOI not everything to solve issues. - Difficulties in transferring manufacturing skills (often skills not formally recognised) - Very much an attitude 'to stick to what we know' rather than take new opportunities in new sectors. People are risk averse and don't usually celebrate success. - Lack of information for people to set up new business in new sectors. Don't know how to start / about basics / how to employ – this is missing from schools' curriculum. - More small business enterprise – need a breakdown of micro businesses – what sectors are they operating in. 70% of new start businesses in Harryville from social support background / disabilities – there is a lack of opportunity for people with disabilities to develop a career path. - More detail on business deaths – why are businesses failing? Need research into why certain things are not successful. - More recognition of work being done by individuals (activity mapping) eg Green Pastures in Ballymena. Tourism - Refinement of data to allow analysis on visitor numbers by area and by attraction.	increase visitor attractions to complement big draws such as NW200 and Causeway; increase visitor spend in the area to support business growth. 3. Make MEA unique: Increase job opportunities through self employment, inward investment (filling empty premises); need to make MEA a more attractive place to live, work and play; provide good quality housing; needs integrated approach. *Is there anything missing from the evidence baseline?* - Economic data – can this be drilled down to a lower geographic level? - Age profiles – where are the young people going? - NISRA deprivation stats. - Housing availability? - Data on infrastructure – audit of facilities (toilets, car parks); detail on accommodation; dereliction levels; use of public transport; whole area standardisation of facilities; broadband coverage and blackspots. - Skills – educational attainment - Voluntary Groups – walking groups, history groups, crafts, music, etc. - Key assets – historical monuments *What do you feel are the top three key strategic priorities for the region?* 1. Clear and branded tourism offering. 2. More and sustainable employment across all sectors. 3. Build and support entrepreneurial environment.

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	• Geographic breakdown on visitors to identify weaknesses and gaps on inland tourism – tendency to focus on coastal route. • Information on historic sites and possible UNESCO sites in the borough. • Tourism package – additional information on the development of a MEA tourist package similar to Wild Atlantic Way.	*Is there anything missing from the evidence baseline?* • Falling population • Low educational attainment • Low entrepreneurial culture • Incentive for growth businesses *What do you feel are the top three key strategic priorities for the region?* 1. Enterprise Zone. 2. Incentives/Tax/Rates/Rental. 3. Integrated approach. *Is there anything missing from the evidence baseline?* • More information around levels of skills • Available beds in the area *What do you feel are the top three key strategic priorities for the region?* 1. Encourage entrepreneurships. 2. Tourism – highlight and branding of tourist attractions. 3. Increase skills in non-academic facilities. 4. Lifestyle enhancement – becoming welcoming. 5. Build upon motorcycling racing heritage.
Frank McGrogan	ECONOMIC STATISTICS • What are the % changes in the main employment sectors – last 5 -10 years – help identify trends • Scale/impact of the Third Sector	POENTIAL PRIORITY GAME CHANGERS 1. Global Brand (e.g. NI/Ulster Tourism) with MEA region focus on quality product and excellent service (need for training to increase visitor spend)

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	• Travel to Work/Work Patterns – people who work in Borough but live outside it • Infrastructure provision – roads, public transport, broadband • Statistics of Youth Employment • Statistics for Educational attainment • Any stats relating to Decentralisation of government sector jobs to the Borough • Impacts of EU funds in region pre-brexit on Business/FDI/Investment/Tourism • Construction Statistics – houses/social housing, new builds TOURISM STATISTICS • Baseline appears pretty comprehensive • VFR – any stats on how much local host spending worth • Beds – location and growth in beds provision in recent years by type of accommodation • Attractions – opportunities any new ones • Visitor Surveys – qualitative feedback on how local/international visitors perceive the Borough • No of tourism 'events' held in the region v others in NI / UK over certain thresholds, 1,000 10,000 Need for 'pre-baseline' trends in economic / tourism statistics Retain traditional manufacturing base of East Antrim / skills that still exist but diversify into other new value added sectors through partnership with INI and others.	2. Focus on a specific sector advanced manufacturing/Skills/Training/Entrepreneurship – utilise JTI/sites as advanced manufacturing Park / partner with NRC robotics …. 3. Significant/Strategic focused investment in Town Centres – Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne as service centres for the region, but with specific focus on each (Transport hub, heritage/tourism, Retail/Leisure)

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	MEA within easy travel distance of Belfast – hence ensure benefit from job creation in Greater Belfast region (local spending power) Good tourism offer – Causeway Coastal route – with Gobbins due to come back on stream in 2017 - however any additional game-changers to make it stand out within NI offer (National Park/Major National/International standard event(s))	
Ursula O'Loughlin	All members were content with the economic baseline information. A few minor additions were noted: 1. **Education statistics –** Would be useful to include the educational attainment statistics for MEA - GCSE, A Level & University 2. **Deprivation statistics –** In relation to the Council area to set the scene and to confirm pockets of deprivation etc. 3. **Infrastructure statistics -** e.g. car ownership/public transport usage, Wi Fi sources, rural broadband 4. **Tourism statistics -** More specific statistics regarding the number of hotel/B&B rooms available in the area would be useful 5. **Audit of Assets & Facilities –** To showcase our key attributes e.g tourism assets, public toilets, car parking, community infrastructure, libraries, Tourist Information Offices etc.	The top 3 Key Strategic priorities were agreed as follows: (in no particular order) 1. **Clear Tourism Offering with Meaningful Branding** 2. **More and Sustainable Employment Across all Sectors** 3. **Build and Support an Entrepreneurial Environment** For points 2 and 3 it was noted the importance of: • Developing our Skills base • Improving Educational Opportunities & Attainment • Building confidence to develop entrepreneurship, • Being Able to attract investors, workers and to nurture local talent • Developing infrastructure that fit for purpose to drive growth in our local economy

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	6. **Information on Partners who can assist in Promoting the Area** – e.g Voluntary organisations/individuals who can support the local tourism offering e.g. walking groups, story tellers, local historians		
Ainsley McWilliams	**General comments:** • Delegates not aware of many of the stats shown specifically with regard to tourism • MEA's large number of micro businesses was surprising • MEA should encourage the 'big businesses' to be ambassadors for the area i.e. appealing to their sense of corporate social responsibility • Get the stats out to providers • Ferry crossing to and from Larne is expensive • MEA needs to be seen as the easiest council to do business with and this must be backed up with up-to-date facts and figures • Should introduce tourism and business barometers with up-to date facts & figures with comparisons to other council areas **Gaps:** • What is the capacity for growth within the area's micro businesses?	**General comments:** • There must be a clear, consistent, cohesive message from all sectors in attracting visitors like the Wild Atlantic Way has done • Dereliction in towns and villages is a factor due to on-line shopping, must be looking at creative usage for premises in the peripheral streets • MEA needs to figure out what it wants to be recognised for **Top 3 key strategic priorities:** 1. **Increase visitor spend and set a SMART target** 2. **Developing sustainable tourism whilst protecting the environment** 3. **Attracting new businesses – do we have the right skill set, are we ready to do this?**	

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	• Are there stats on current/imminent investments? • NI now seen as a safe place to visit and to do business – are there stats to confirm this? • Who are our 'best bet' customers in terms of attracting businesses and visitors i.e. maybe our target market shouldn't be the ones on the tour buses • What are the most productive forums to encourage collaborative working? • Detail the decision making process that makes visitors go from looking to booking? • The 'softer stats' that encourage businesses to set up here i.e. house process, schools, cost of living etc • What is the NI brand and how does MEA fit into this? • Should be looking at best practice – what areas are 'doing' tourism and business really well • What are the factors that discourage investment and visitors?	
Lis Graham	Population – • Number of people of working age • Age profile • People moving into area	1 – Employment Foreign direct investment from a large employer with competitively paid jobs that is sustainable in the long term, utilising were possible vacant sites within town centres.

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	• People moving out of area Education – • Educational attainment dependant on sector e.g. industry/construction/I.T. • Educational attainment above NVQ level 4 Travel – • Travel to work figures – updated • Travel to work outside principle towns – to what other area Workforce – • Number of Apprentices in MEA are and what sectors • Workforce stats, e.g. productivity, sick days, outputs, education attainment after employment or training Social – • Social deprivation – unemployment, single parent, housing benefits. Super output areas. • Highlighting areas of employment , the actions that ned to be taken • Breakdown of unemployment by principle towns Retail – • Retail / office unit vacancy • Footfall information • House price index and rental market performance Tourism –	2 – Tourism & Town Centres Better access to tourism facilities and creating a brand which contributes to a more vibrant town centre and utilises existing culture provision. 3 – Education Improve educational attainment.

	• Visitor attraction numbers, breakdown of spend depending on location. Then average spend per visitor. • Hotels in MEA and bed spaces – projections what is needed to cater for demand and what is forecast for development.	
Rosemary McCormick	All present agreed the baseline statistics but felt some key information regarding tourism was missing. The table was predominantly made up of tourism representatives specifically from the Carrickfergus legacy council area. • **Marketing** – Urgently require a stronger branding for the area and felt there was more a focus continually on Causeway Coast & Glens and key opportunities were being missed We require more joined up working/collaboration with neighbouring councils. Viewpoint was that Tourism NI 's "clustering" was not the best means of promotion as an overall package – felt key areas were left out of the Cluster Lack of communication between council areas – perceived fear of information sharing Group felt linkages not good enough with Tourism Ireland eg, need the Wild Atlantic inland 40 miles extended to cover wider area than just coastal route – this is a big area we are missing out on Overall viewpoint that the message on tourism was very fragmented – lack of agreement on Tourism NI's stance on The Gobbins being a	1. **Flagship Visitor Attraction** – the creation of a Theme park similar to Tayto Factory Park/ Alton Towers/Centre Parks - Increase GVA outside Belfast - Job creation /skills development - Attraction of greater visitor numbers that could be linked into other free events across the Borough such as festivals/weekend events in towns and villages - Needs council to buy in - Encourage funders (difficulty with funding from banks, building societies, etc 2. **Complementary Packages** – overall support package for tourism similar to agriculture. - Mentoring support covering all areas key to hospitality - Health & Safety - Funding opportunities (tourism needs grants) - Training/skills development - A level playing field established across the borough - Familiarity trips developed for the overall borough

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"Game Changer" as group perceived a lack of overall infrastructure surrounding The Gobbins. They agreed the facility needs to reopen as soon as possible, as tourists were being turned away. Council communication with this issue was viewed very poorly.

Signage is very poor across the council area

- **Infrastructure Problems** – Broadband accessibility in some areas perceived as poor which has resulted in lack of on-line tourism opportunities

  Group felt it would be useful to have better visitor profiles and a mapping of destinations covered during visits

  Build on successes of Game of Thrones and attract further TV film companies to work in MEA

- **Nightime Economy** – Needs rejuvenated and a change in Trading & Licensing legislation to allow for extended shopping hours and better entertainment /live music in our towns and villages to improve the overall visitor experience

- **Skills/Training Development** – Greater requirement for Council to assist in skills and training development. A level playing field for all tourism facilities/accommodation in terms of the level of hospitality provided eg, greater emphasis on World Host training. Perception that the large majority of those working in hospitality have no

3. **Programme Delivery of a Larger NI/ROI Product** – delivery of a larger NI/ROI product eg, NI Whiskey Trail with linkages through Tourism Ireland complementary to Year of Food. Great Taste awards, etc. Readymade market for other attractions increasing bed spaces and providing opportunity for overall regeneration and investment in key tours across the borough and allowing for MEA competition on a global scale

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	formal academic qualifications however there is possibility of an increment based skills development programme for the tourism/hospitality industry • **Regeneration of Local Areas (Islandmagee/Browns Bay) –** The viewpoint was that Council needed to react urgently and positively to key issues such as closure of local caravan park and shop/hospitality opportunities Possible social economy opportunity should be explored for the local community and job creation Viewpoint that the beaches need cleaned up to become more accessible and openly promoted as a place to visit Viewpoint that planning processes were too long and involved too much Red Tape	
Paul Duffy	**Feedback on Data** • What is the visitor numbers by attraction (local data) – information is there through local community etc • Felt that the gap in the baseline mainly reflects who is visiting our current facilities, where they are from, length of stay etc • Tourism headline figure probably ok • Economic development data seems appropriate • Need for ongoing data collation – room for improvement in this area going forward	**Priorities identified** • Above UK average business birth rate – focus on priority sectors • Improve productivity, linked with skills – focus on priority sectors and meeting local companies needs • Increase spend • Branding area clear identity • Full employment • Reduce costs of doing business – energy/rates etc • Retain skilled workforce

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	• Need for physical surveys locally going forward • Question on the validity of the data • Need to identify what local data we need to capture going forward **General comments** • Need for better advertising on the area local attractions (Blackhead Path & **Whitehead Railway** • Need for sharing information amongst all partners • Leaflets for distribution locally • Why are visitors not staying at night? • Simplified information collation process which allows information to be fed real time On a regular basis • How is information captured • What information do we need	**Key priorities (3)** • Creating strong regional identity • Full employment – focus on priority sectors, increasing business birth rate, productivity, skills • Retain and build on current skilled workforce

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