

24th January 2008.

Northumberland Market Towns Offer Warmer Welcome

Six market towns across Northumberland are taking part in a programme to boost their visitor economies. Many businesses are dependent on trade from visitors, throughout the year - not just in the summer. With ever-increasing competition from cheap flights tempting people abroad for short breaks, market towns need to review what they offer to visitors if they are to continue to attract people.

The Market Town Welcome Programme, funded by One North East, aims to help towns look to the future and to raise their game. Working with local authorities, Northumberland Tourism, Northumberland Strategic Partnership and many local business groups, the programme will bring together businesses to develop a vision for what their town will offer visitors in 5 or 10 years time. Each town will then work up a destination plan, which will guide investment to achieve the vision. The towns involved are Berwick on Tweed, Haltwhistle, Amble, Wooler, Seahouses and Alnwick.

Kirsten Francis of One North East, who is leading the work, said *"We want each town to focus on its strengths and develop a strong identity which will attract more visitors and encourage them to stay longer. Tourism is such an important part of the economy in Northumberland, we want to support and encourage businesses to deliver a really top quality product."*

Giles Ingram of Northumberland Tourism added; *"Each town needs to understand its visitors better. What are visitors in the 21st century looking for? What will make them want to return? There's a great opportunity for our fantastic market towns to work together and capitalise on recent trends such as the growing demand for quality local food and drink."*

In XXXXX the work is being led by XXXXXXXXX and XXXXXXX. "This is a really great opportunity" said XXXXXXX. *"We want all businesses which have any contact with visitors to get involved."* To kick off there's a short survey for businesses to fill in to give their views on what needs to be done. Information on all the visitor facilities in each town is being collected and a workshop will be held in March so that anyone can get involved in discussions over how to improve the facilities and the overall visitor welcome. More information is available on www.markettownwelcome.co.uk.

Local people are also being asked to send in their photos of the good and bad features of their towns. *"It's quite difficult for local people to see their own town through a visitor's eyes,"* said Nick Miller of Miller Research who is co-ordinating the programme. *"So collecting photos will help us all focus on each town's special qualities, their strengths and weaknesses and how best to improve the visitor welcome."* You can email photos to ruth@miller-research.co.uk or upload them to the website.

For further information contact:

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