

REVIEW: 19TH QUARTERLY FORUM

The 19th Quarterly Forum meeting took place on Tuesday 15th July 2008 at the Albermarle Music Centre on Ferensway, Hull. The main guest speakers were John Meehan, Editor of the Hull Daily Mail and Janet Reuben, Chief Executive of Visit Hull & East Yorkshire, the Destination Management Organisation for the Yorkshire sub-region. There were also elections for several groups, including the Forum's Steering Group and ONE HULL Partnership. The event was well attended with a large turnout of over 100 people.

- **Forum Update & Elections**

The meeting began at 4.30pm with Nick Pontone providing a short Forum Update; a review of the Forum's activities which included the recent meetings of the Business Advisory Group, future meetings of the Hull & Humber Enterprise Network and the Forum's involvement with the ongoing campaign on Humber Bridge tolls. The Forum's elections had been promoted via the Forum's website and newsletter over previous weeks and there had been significant interest in



all of the groups seeking new members. Nick Pontone presented the names of those who were standing for election and due to there being no need for contested elections, the nominations were agreed and the new members elected.



Nick Pontone introduced Gerard Liston, Enterprise Co-ordinator at Laisterdyke Business & Enterprise College in Bradford. Gerard gave a brief introduction to a pioneering new project, the Enterprise Exchange, which is soon to be established in Hull. The Exchange

will bring together employers, schools, colleges and others who want to see enterprise flourish in the city. It will encourage the sharing of skills, experiences and information via an interactive online forum and face to face meetings with the aim of creating direct opportunities for working together. He explained that schools and business people will post notes on the site asking for or offering a range of services or opportunities, all with the aim of creating a better understanding of business and creating opportunities for young people.

- **Janet Reuben, Chief Executive, Visit Hull & East Yorkshire (VHEY)**

Janet Reuben introduced Visit Hull & East Yorkshire, the Destination Management Organisation for the region and explained her main objectives of growing tourism by 5% per annum, improving the quality of visitor experience,

increasing tourism employment and creating a step change in image, reputation and destination awareness through public, private partnership activity. She highlighted the crucial and successful partnership working between Hull City Council and East Riding Council who are co-funders of VHEY alongside Yorkshire Forward. The VHEY website is getting a significant number of visitors and parts of the site are available in French, German and Dutch to allow visitors from overseas to access information about the region. Janet reported that there had been a 30% increase in Mini Cruise arrivals during the 1st quarter of 2008 into Hull via the port and a 282% increase in February of this year. This is due to an increase in joint working between VHEY & P&O ferries. This is in addition to a significant advertising campaign in ferry terminals both in Hull and Zeebrugge. Hull has also gained national recognition in recent months, not only because of recent success on the football pitch but also through a supplement in the Times newspaper and through a visit by Simon Calder, the Independent's travel editor, who filmed a piece on Hull for



the Enjoy England website. Janet highlighted a recent success for the city when it came runner up in the 'Most Group Friendly UK Destination' awards. Given that Blackpool (which is only a town) came first, this means that Hull (a city) could call itself the most group friendly city in the UK! She also reported that a new branding campaign had been launched to promote the Yorkshire Wolds as a key visitor destination and VHEY was investing £20,000 in the Hull Fish Trail.

- **John Meehan, Editor, Hull Daily Mail**

John Meehan began his presentation by recalling the historic and integral role in local life that the Hull Daily Mail has played since it was first published in 1885. Since then, John Meehan said, the Mail has become the most trusted source of local news and information maintaining its independence and impartiality. The paper aims to be a champion of the



local community which campaigns on the issues that matter to local people. Possibly for this reason, it is Yorkshire's biggest selling newspaper and has won a variety of awards including Yorkshire Daily Newspaper of the Year 2003, 2004, 2005 & 2007, UK Regional Daily Newspaper of the Year 2008 and UK Regional Multi-media Publisher of the Year 2008.

John talked through some of the memorable front pages of the past few years which included the opening of the Deep, launch of the 'cog' as a brand for the city and the celebration of 700 years of Hull's status as a city. He stated that the Hull Daily Mail aimed to be popular but not populist; stressing the difference that its coverage is responsible and

anchored in accountability to its readers and as such will never be an uncritical cheerleader. John identified a key strength of his paper which is credibility and this is maintained through its independent voice and by reporting events and issues without fear or favour which can sometimes mean publishing dissenting views, and by questioning and challenging decision makers.

He went on to discuss the Mail as a business organisation. As a company which employs more than 250 people, the Mail is also a major local institution and one that has been chronicling local life for 123 years. It is also expanding its operations to include projects such as 'Stuff4Sale' a private buying and selling marketplace – a kind of local eBay. This site now receives 1 million page views from 18,000 unique visitors a month. Most recently the paper has launched a new online directory – Mailgofind.co.uk – which carries details of 14,000 businesses. It also has extensive coverage of sports news and covers the local property, car and job markets through its dedicated websites. Moving on to cover readership statistics, John reported that the Mail's weekly readership is 251,399 with its website getting 4,965,297 page views a month and 88% of people access a part of its portfolio of projects at least once a week.

Moving on to the floods, John described how an additional 45,000 additional copies were sold in the first five weeks after the floods and traffic on its website rocketed. Interestingly, one major change was in public participation; the Mail received almost 500 readers' photos with the majority being published. Most recent campaigns include the "Back Home" campaign which highlighted the plight of those households still displaced from the floods.

He concluded his presentation by pre-emptively answering the most commonly asked question: what is the biggest story the paper has covered? The two most recent big stories were the devastating floods and the promotion to the Premiership by Hull City. However, John said, the biggest long running story is the story of the revival of Hull. Since he became editor 11 years ago the city has been steadily improving and he was proud of the role the paper had played in being part of that.



- **Questions**

Questions then followed the presentations on a range of subjects including investment in the city, the poor image of Hull, the ability to host big conference events and even the name of the city. John Meehan said that the £1Billion of investment had generally been well spent. He particularly praised the Council for its role in the development of the KC

Stadium. Janet Reuben agreed that the level of investment had really made a difference and projects such as Ferensway had made a radical difference. It was agreed that the tight urban boundary of Hull would affect official statistics on issues such as obesity, education or life expectancy and too much of the city's wealth came in at 9am and left at 5pm but the city boundary couldn't be changed; official figures usually made Hull appear worse than it actually is. Both speakers were positive however and said that as the City Centre improved more people might start moving back in and hopefully the continued investment would begin to make a difference. John Meehan acknowledged that the media had a part to play in Hull's poor reputation nationally although he wasn't responsible for the recent 'Duchess in Hull' programme featuring the Duchess of York's visit to the city.



The level of business news in the Hull Daily Mail was also questioned. John Meehan said that the paper did provide a good amount of coverage of business issues in comparison to other papers in the region but he listened to concerns that this could be improved.

Janet was asked about the possibility of building of large conference venue in the city and marketing Hull, like Harrogate, as a place that welcomes large groups for conferences. She agreed that a large convention centre would indeed be a good idea and this could form part of a hotel development in the future.

The 19th Quarterly meeting of the Hull Business Forum achieved coverage in the [Hull Daily Mail business pages](#) and was filmed by Steam Online which is available to watch [here](#)