



Category: Public Sector Campaign

Company: DTW, Sunderland City Council and FVB Joint Venture

Entry title: Northern Spire

Brief and objectives:

DTW was commissioned by Sunderland City Council to provide community and school engagement and PR for Northern Spire, a three-year project to build a new bridge across the River Wear and associated road improvement scheme.

The project will reduce congestion, reduce journey times, and enable regeneration alongside the river, creating jobs and attracting investment.

Objectives:

- a. Maintaining momentum/public understanding and support for different stages of the project and for Sunderland City Council;
- b. To support the positioning of the project within the city's wider regeneration context, creating an improved link from the A19 to the city centre and Port of Sunderland; and
- c. To initiate a "community of interest" and generate excitement around the plans, and to create a lasting legacy that will see more young people interested in careers in the STEM fields by having more than 2,000 children visit during construction.

Rationale behind campaign, including research and planning:

Research included:

- Discussing project plans and perception with 20 key project personnel
- Developing an understanding of engineering methodology and highlighting risks/opportunities
- Reviewing communications infrastructure and media/social media activity
- 15 vox pops interviews with people living and working in the area
- A scoping session with the project team

- Discussing with the council's education team and school leaders on how best to engage with youngsters
- Programme of activities planned for children's visits, including videos, quiz, word search, materials to feel, and viewing area on site.

This was critical in allowing us to get 'under the skin' of the project and in selecting the right approach over a three-year period.

Strategy and tactics, including creativity and innovation:

Strategy:

Our strategic approach was to be:

- Pro-active and positive in our engagement to build trust/credibility
- Part of a bigger Sunderland story – Northern Spire is paving the way for Sunderland's wider plans for job creation, regeneration and inward investment,
- Outcomes-focused
- Visual

Tactics, creativity and innovation:

- Monthly e-newsletter
- Media events – showcasing the engineering on site – the dismantling of the cofferdam in the river (watertight box that enabled work underwater to take place); completion of the bridge deck; installation of the cable stays; the tensioning of the cables; completion of roads and deck; painting of 105m-tall pylon
- Regular media releases (34 from June 2017-18) and website updates
- Dedicated email/telephone line for queries
- Regular visits to near neighbours to listen to concerns/share information
- Visits to site by near neighbours
- Drone, timelapse, boat and ground-based filming – creating a series of stunning films showcasing the visual progress of the project, which were widely used by media/partners
- Quality photography
- Professional body visit programme – visits securing endorsements from leading engineers and professionals, including ICE, APM
- Social media – using the council's existing Facebook and Twitter accounts

- Website – www.northernspire.co.uk – the online home of the project
- Weekly school visit programme, enabling students to learn about the project and challenges, take part in a quiz, feel some of the materials used, and watch the site at work from a safe viewing area
- Installation of classroom and safe viewing area on site for children, and materials sourced for them to feel and experience
- Schools encouraged and supported to learn about the project with their own projects
- College work experience, workability programme for jobseekers, and Safety Sam visits to schools
- Encourage visits to site

Implementation of tactics:

Summer 2015 – Research and strategy development

Autumn 2015 to date – Ongoing engagement

Our team is embedded on site as part of the project team for 3-4 days a week, allowing us to be outcomes-focused but flexible enough to react to inevitable changes in programme. It also enables us to highlight reputational issues at a Board level to ensure that reputation is always considered in project-planning. Key events included:

June 2017 onwards – College work experience

June 2017 - School visits held weekly on site

June 2017 onwards - Site team supports individual school projects

July 2017 - Cable stays installed

August 2017 - Divers dismantle cofferdam

November 2017 - Cables tensioned to 100%

March 2018 -The Story so Far

May 2018 - Project nears completion – update

May 2018 - Presentation to ICE

Measurement and evaluation:

Our outcomes demonstrate success against objectives:

1. Maintaining momentum/public understanding;
 - Print and broadcast media reach of 195.2million through 1,470 pieces of media coverage, 99% positive/neutral in sentiment. This included all major national newspapers, BBC One's The One Show, Hello! magazine, as well as international trade magazines, TV bulletin leads and live reports from the site. The project also starred in national BBC documentary Sea Cities, and Inside Out programme.
 - Visit to site by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge
 - Our videos have been widely used by key media, and seen by millions of people. There have been more than 16,000 video views of the Northern Spire playlist.
2. To support the positioning of the project within the city's wider regeneration;
 - BBC's The One Show featured Northern Spire as part of a feature on the engineering and the regeneration benefits to the city.
 - BBC Sea Cities documentary featured the project as part of a wider focus on the city and its plans for growth.
 - The project was awarded a one-off "Special Project Award", by the Institution of Civil Engineering, which said: "This project has captured the public interest, both in the immediate area and nationally. The scale, complexity of construction and design of this scheme has brought the industry of civil engineering, in many of its guises, to the public's attention. They also engaged with the local community in many ways – from hosting over 2,000 school pupil visits to the site to some of the team going out to the classrooms with the construction mascot 'Safety Sam'.
3. To initiate a "community of interest" and generate excitement..... and to create a lasting legacy.
 - 2,300 schoolchildren from 46 schools visited site during 116 sessions, with teachers giving the following average scores:
 - Session content 4.91 out of 5
 - Pupil interaction 4.8 out of 5
 - Value of session 4.92 out of 5

Teacher feedback – "Facts, inspiring. Gives the children pride in Sunderland, of their local area. Great resources, videos etc. Amazing opportunity for our children. Follow up work will be great in school."

- Careers in Construction talks delivered to 1,560 students
- Safety Sam "Play Safe – Stay Safe' programme delivered to 675 pupils

- 77 STEM students from Sunderland College on work experience
- Employability training for 91 students

Budget and cost effectiveness:

The communications budget is less than 0.5% of the overall project budget but has made a key contribution to its impact.