

Report to Executive

Agenda
Item:

A.8

Meeting Date: 31st May 2013
Portfolio: Environment & Transport
Key Decision: No
Within Policy and Budget Framework: No
Public / Private: Public

Title: Talkin Tarn
Report of: Talkin Tarn Task and Finish Group – Economy & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel
Report Number: OS 12/13

Summary:

This provides the final report of the Talkin Tarn Country Park task and finish group, which was endorsed by the E&E Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 8th May 2013. The Panels supported the recommendations of the task group, which are contained in page 3 within the attached report. The minute extract from the Panel meeting is also provided for information. The Panel agreed to forward the report to the Executive for a formal response to this Panel on the recommendations made.

Recommendations:

The Executive is asked to:

- Consider the attached Talkin Tarn scrutiny report.
- Provide their response to each recommendation made within the report to the next meetings of the E&E O&S Panel on 13th June 2013.

Tracking

Executive:	31 st May 2013
Overview and Scrutiny:	8 th May 2013
Council:	

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**Appendices Talkin Tarn - Report of the Task and Finish Group
attached to report:**

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

- **None**

Economy & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Talkin Tarn



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Recommendations

The Task Group make the following recommendations:

1. That the Executive support the Officers in pursuing potential franchise initiatives which could be accommodated at Talkin Tarn. This should would attract a wider customer base whilst remaining sensitive to the natural surroundings of the Country Park.
2. Members recommend that details of the scheme are finalised and marketed as soon as possible in order to attract users of the Tarn to the scheme. Consideration should be given to advertising within Brampton Parish Council's BIG newsletter.
3. Members of the Task Group recommend that the vacant Green Spaces Officer post is recruited to as soon as possible.
4. That the whole offer of the Tea Room and Gift Shop should be reviewed in order to attract more custom. This review should include consideration to the option of franchising the Tea Room. This review should include consideration to the option of franchising the Tea Room.
5. That a strategy for the marketing and promotion of Talkin Tarn is undertaken with support from officers within the Communications Section
6. That officers continue to pursue enquiries with local public transport providers to promote Talkin Tarn Country Park in order to attract more visitors and provide adequate transport links.

Introduction

1. Talkin Tarn Country Park is a 165 acre site containing a glacial tarn surrounded by mature woodland and gentle meadows close to the market town of Brampton.¹
2. The Tarn has a 1.3 mile circular path that is ideal for a gentle stroll. This path is hard surfaced and accessible to all. There are also three way marked trails of varying lengths; 1.5km, 2.5km and 3.5km starting from the car park and on into woods and fields.
3. The boathouse has been renovated to incorporate a Tearoom and Gift shop. The whole building has full disabled access including a lift.
4. Carlisle City Council took over the management of Talkin Tarn Country Park in April 2006 from Cumbria County Council and invested £1 million to upgrade the existing facilities to ensure they comply with the Disability Discrimination Act and health & safety regulations.
5. It was identified within the Business Plan for the Country Park dated January 2007 that “the realities of local government finances mean that the Country Park should not be a financial burden on the council taxpayers of Carlisle” and that “we both keep costs strictly under control and also seek to general income from consumers of our services”.²
6. Potential income streams including car parking charges were identified and introduced to the Tarn following transfer to the City Council.
7. During the scrutiny of the 2013/14 budget Members of the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel raised concerns about the proposed increase of Car Parking Charges for visitors to Talkin Tarn. Members were informed that the Country Park was running at a deficit and it was always the intention that the Park should be cost neutral to the Authority.
8. Members of the Panel resolved that they wished to look at this issue more closely and therefore commissioned a Task Group to investigate and return to the Panel with its findings.
9. Cllrs Allison, Nedved, Prest, Sherriff and Watson were appointed to the Task Group who would undertake the review. It was agreed that the Task Group should present their findings and draft recommendations to the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel by the end of the 2012/13 Civic Year.
10. The Task Group held their initial meeting on 8th January 2013 and agreed that their Terms of Reference would be:
 - To gain an understanding of the budgetary position of Talkin Tarn Country Park, by examining income, expenditure and central charges.
 - To look at the existing service provision at the Talkin Tarn Country Park and make any recommendations for change and/or improvement.

¹www.carlisle.gov.uk/leisure_and_culture/parks_and_open_spaces/parks_and_open_spaces/talkin_tarn.aspx

² Talkin Tarn Business Plan 2006-08 CS07/07 Report to Executive 22nd January 2007

- To look at other potential income streams which could be pursued in order to enhance the visitor experience and increase visitor number to the Tarn whilst keeping sympathetic to the natural surroundings of the Country Park.
11. The group agreed that their objective was to make recommendations which will assist in ensuring that Talkin Tarn Country Park remains a viable asset to the Authority and serves the needs of the visiting public.

Methodology

12. In order to develop the evidence base for the review Task and Finish Group Members considered a wide range of information and data including the following:

- Talkin Tarn Country Park Management Plan 2010-15 (including 5 Year Action Plan)
- CS07/07 Talkin Tarn Business Plan Director of Community Services – report to Executive 22/1/07
- Talkin Tarn Visitor Survey 2008 CN Research on behalf of Carlisle City Council
- FIS Reports for Cost Centre 15170/ Talkin Tarn, Neighbourhood and Green Spaces 2011/12 and 2012/13
- LE34/12 Review of Charges 2013/14, Director of Local Environment, Report to Executive 19th November 2012

13. Task Group Members also took oral evidence from the following individuals:

- Steven Tickner, Chief Accountant, Carlisle City Council
- Jonathon May, Team Leader, Neighbourhood and Green Spaces, Carlisle City Council
- Phil Gray, Neighbourhood and Green Spaces Manager, Carlisle City Council
- Vice Chairman of Brampton Parish Council
- Clerk to Brampton Parish Council
- Chairman of the Talkin Tarn Amateur Rowing Club
- Secretary of the Talkin Tarn Amateur Rowing Club
- Cllr Stephen Layden, Brampton Ward Member
- Three representatives from Brampton Tourist Information Centre
- Talkin Tarn Tea Room Manager

Attended
consultation
session on 11th
March 2013

14. Meetings of the Task Group were held on:

Date	Purpose	Attendees
8 th January 2013	Consider background material and scope review	Task Group Members Neighbourhood & Green Spaces Manager Team Leader – Green Spaces Scrutiny Officer Lead Committee Clerk
6 th February 2013	Meet with Officer from Finance	Task Group Members Chief Accountant Neighbourhood & Green Spaces Manager Team Leader – Green Spaces Scrutiny Officer Committee Clerk
11 th March 2013	Consultation session with	Task Group Members See paragraph 6

Date	Purpose	Attendees
	stakeholders	Scrutiny Officer Team Leader – Green Spaces Lead Committee Clerk
24 th April 2013	Share findings with Portfolio Holder	Cllr Watson (Lead Member) Cllr Martlew (Portfolio Holder) Director of Local Environment Scrutiny Officer

Findings

Transfer of ownership

16. On 18th January 2005 Council agreed to proceed with the transfer of the Talkin Tarn Estate from Cumbria County Council, conditional on addressing issues relating to toxic blue/green algae and strengthening the business case.³
17. The business case considered by Members in June/July 2005 detailed that the estimated overall cost of the scheme was £997,625 capital cost phased over two years and a net revenue requirement of £70,000 per annum recurring. The County Council would provide a dowry of £40,000 per year for 5 years.⁴
18. Tarn End House was not included in the transfer and subsequently Cumbria County Council sold the former Hotel to a developer in 2009 for £450,000. The building currently stands empty and is surrounded by metal railings.
19. The business case stated that there was an adequate revenue budget set (ie £70,000) but a modest car park change would need to be introduced and the tea room business improved to pay for the running of the estate. It was also expected that small grants would be available for minor improvements to the infrastructure including ICREW (Improving Coastal and Recreational Waters for All) EU-funded projects and Cumbria Waste Management Environment Trust. It was also suggested that through the development of the Friends of Talkin Tarn, there would also be opportunities to improve income from schools, sponsorships, events and other promotions.
20. The overall objectives were summarised as:
 - To retain public ownership and access to Talkin Tarn estate by transferring it from the County Council to the City Council.
 - To provide enhanced facilities for the public through a general refurbishment and upgrade of the buildings.
 - To improve public access and comply with Disability Discrimination legislation by upgrading appropriate footpaths and the car park.
 - To improve the ecological and environmental aspects of the estate.
 - To bring forward proactive management which promotes various Carlisle City Council corporate objectives in relation to leisure, culture, environmental and educational themes.
21. With regard to the blue/green algae the County Council agreed to indemnify the City Council for a period of 2 years. A report was also commissioned which concluded that it was unlikely that the algae would be fully eradicated – but it could be managed.
22. Subsequently the Talkin Tarn estate was transferred to the ownership of the City Council in April 2006.

³ Minutes of meeting of Full Council, Carlisle City Council 18/01/05

⁴ Talkin Tarn Estate Business Plan June 2005

Income Generation & Available Facilities

23. A Business Plan for the operation of Talkin Tarn 2006-08 was developed during 2006 and approved by the Executive on 22nd January 2007. The Business Plan introduced parking charges for the Tarn and identified the various income streams. The Plan stated that the objectives for income generation for 2006-08 were:
- To generate sufficient income so that Talkin Tarn Country Park operates as a cost-neutral element in the City Council's budget;
 - To spread the income by generating activities as widely as possible so that the contribution made by each individual visitor, as a proportion of the overall figure, is minimised;
 - To provide excellent value for money for all our paying customers.⁵
24. Potential income streams were identified as follows and include an up to date summary/cost/income for each area.
25. **County Council dowry** - £40,000 for five years commencing in 2006/07 (clearly this has now ended).
26. **Car Parking Charges - Parking charges at Talkin Tarn were introduced in 2007.**
- | | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 | 2012/13 | 2013/14 |
|----------------|---|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| | Up to 2 hours
Free
Over 2 hours
£2 | Up to 2 hours – free
Over 2 hours -
£2.10 | 10am-6pm £1

Annual permit -
£30 | 10am-6pm - £1

Annual Permit -
£30 | 10am-6pm - £1

Annual Permit -
£30 | 10am-6pm -
£1
Annual Permit -
£30 | 10am – 6pm Up to 1 hour - £1
More than 1 hour - £2
Talkin Tarn Membership -
£52 |
| Parking Income | | | £24,000 | £29,500 | £28,332 | Approx £26,000 | Estimate £31,000 |
27. **Fishing** – day permit £2.50 for an adult and £1.50 for under 16s. Annual permit available for £25
28. **Boating Permits** – Self-launch boating permits are available (non-motorised craft only) at £5 per day.
29. **Guided Walks/Cycle Rides, Events** – A limited programme of events was previously offered but do not now take place.
30. **Rowing Boat Franchise** – renewed annually and generating about £1,000 p.a. However there has been a period of inactivity during 2012. However invitations to tender for the 2013 rowing boat franchise have recently been advertised along with an opportunity for a business to offer various non motorised water sports from the Tarn.
31. **Rowing Club** – A new building has also been added which is funded and run by the amateur rowing club. The club pay £1,000 per annum to use the Tarn and there is also a live web

⁵ Talkin Tarn Business Plan 2006-08 Report to Executive 22nd January 2007

cam overlooking the Tarn which they use to monitor the water's condition. The Club also bring in additional events to the Tarn such as the Annual Regatta.

32. **Education/Training Programmes** - As well as the hire of the Cabin (see below) there are a number of educational facilities for the use of schools. Visits are self-led by teachers and school staff. The Green Spaces Team Leader is currently working with the Groundwork Trust who are to undertake market research in schools to determine what they require and expect from a visit to the Tarn. The Trust are also to undertake the environmental educational work which the Council previously undertook but no longer were able to run the service due to cost savings.
33. **Estate Letting** – the grazing fields around the Tarn are let to a local farmer (April-November) generating income of about £2,000 p.a.
34. **Hire of Education Cabin** – The cabin is available to hire for activities such as meetings, training courses and children's parties. Current charges for hire are £25 half day (£30 2013/14), £50 full day (£55 2013/14) or £6.25 per hour (£6.50 per hour with a minimum charge of 2 hours from 2013/14). Income varies but is approximately £4,000 p.a.
35. **Friends of Talkin Tarn County Park** – this proposal of an annual fee of £50 was not accepted by the Executive in 2007 and no joining fee was therefore introduced at that time. Currently Membership of "the friends of" is free and open to all. There is an option to have information emailed or posted. Around 80 'Friends' are on the current mailing list. It is proposed that the Talkin Tarn Membership scheme (see paragraphs 19 and 36) will take the place of the Friends group.
36. **Talkin Tarn Membership Scheme** – the scheme was introduced as part of the 2013/14 budget proposals. Membership is £52 per annum and will include annual parking permit, discount in the tearoom and a newsletter.
37. **Corporate or Private Sponsorship** – As yet no private sponsorship is in place.
38. **Alex Boat House** – currently charges £30 per day or 15% of takings. The Boat House is used for exhibitions and already is substantially booked for the whole of 2013. Income is approximately £2,500
39. **Tea Room** – The Talkin Tarn tea room is open throughout the year, from 10:30am – 4:00pm Easter-August and during the Autumn/Winter (September-Easter) is open 10:30am – 4:00pm Thursday – Sunday with a takeaway service Monday-Wednesday. An initial concern of Overview and Scrutiny back in 2006 was that the tea room closure of 4:30pm during the Summer months was inadequate.
40. **Boat House Tea Room expenditure & income summary, 2011-12 (last full year)**

Expenditure	£	Income	£
Staffing Cost	77,600	Gift sales	9,400
Premises	5,800	Refreshment sales	127,200
Supplies & services	49,000	Events etc	5,800
Total	132,400	Total	142,400

Notes: 1. Figures rounded to nearest 100.
2. Surplus for the year = £10,000

3. These are 'operating' figures only. Central overheads of £29,600 are added to the expenditure column, leaving a net loss of £19,600

41. The approximate income for 2012/13 for the Tea Room is £127,400. The very poor weather throughout 2012 has seen a reduction of about 25% for visitor attractions across Cumbria and Talkin Tarn was in line with that reduction and this is reflected in the reduced income to the Tea Room.
42. The costs of maintenance of the park and running of the Tea Room have been substantially reduced in 2012-13 as part of Local Environment's transformation programme. The Tarn no longer has a dedicated full time manager and management is now provided by a Site Management Team Leader and one Greenspaces Officer in the Neighbourhood and Green Spaces Team who spends 2 days a week at the Tarn. Last year there were 2 full time employees in the tearoom and 5 casual staff. This year there are 1 full time employee in the tearoom and a number of casual staff.
43. It was agreed in the Business Plan when Talkin Tarn was taken over by the City Council that profit or loss on the Tarn or the teahouse was ringfenced for Tarn purposes. In 2012/13 there was a balance brought forward of £95,000; some of which was used to cover the cost of re-surfacing the car park. The net costs for 2012/13 were £84,000 for the Tarn and £11,000 for the tearoom. The underspends had been built up over the years and would continue to do so. The forecast was that the balance to be carried over from 2012/13 would be £14,000. By the end of the financial year there would be an underspend of £7,000 on the tarn and a loss of £17,000 on the tearoom. That would leave a carry forward figure of £3,000.
44. Members were advised that in most years it would be expected that there would be an underspend at the end of the financial year. The figure for 2012/13 was down due to the reduced numbers of visitors due to the very bad weather. However, Easter was the busiest time for the Tarn and the tearoom so it is anticipated that the final end of year figure could be higher than currently indicated.
45. With regard to future pressures on the budget Members were informed that there was some subsidence in the tearoom that would cost £20,000 to repair, (those costs would come out of the Property Maintenance Budget), that there may be a cost to control the blue/green algae and work may be needed to the two small boathouses at some point in the future. If the underspends were built up over time this would fund the work.
46. Opportunities were being investigated regarding the pleasure boats, other water sports, outdoor adventure franchise, an increase in school based activities, increase in functions and an increase in the commemorative offer at the Tarn and those opportunities would be consulted on at the appropriate time. Further opportunities for the Tarn would be investigated such as franchises which would allow rent collection and would not be onerous on Council staff.

Central Recharges

47. The Task Group met with the Chief Accountant to gain an understanding of the central recharges associated with Talkin Tarn.
48. The Group were informed that central recharges are, in effect, the cost on central services such as ICT, Finance, Legal, Payroll, HR, etc which must, under proper accounting practices, be charged to the front line service which enjoys the benefit of such support. That allows the Council to provide the total cost of direct council services. Central service/support services

would recharge to each other; and it was necessary to “fix” those charges in order to calculate the charge to the front line services.

49. Accounting regulations (Code of Practice) are quite specific about how and what is recharged and those recharges must be included in the Council's Annual Statement of Accounts. When a service is being reviewed, the support service must be included in the total cost of the service; however that is not to say that it was the total cost which was saved if the service ceased.
50. If there is a significant change to a front line service, then there will be a requirement to assess the impact on central departments to see if their workload had reduced significantly too.
51. With regard to Talkin Tarn in 2012/13 the £100,000 net budget includes central recharges of £50,800 for the Tarn and £31,800 for the Tearoom (total £82,600). The recharges are to the garage, Local Environment Performance Improvement Team, Building Services, Highway Services, Stores, Parking Services, Green Spaces Management and Site Management, IT, Finance Team, Legal, Creditors, Debtors, Payroll, Personnel, Health and Safety, Organisational Development Team and Policy and Communications.
52. Some of the re-charges are based on a head count and some are recharged on a percentage of time spent. For example recharges relating to Personnel were based on a head count and several of the staff employed in the tearoom are employed on a casual basis some for only 1-2 hours per week but accrue a recharge each.
53. Officers have looked at the way the recharges are calculated during the time of this review and Members have recently been informed that that the central recharges for Talkin Tarn will be reduced in 2013/14 to £54,800.
54. The HLS grant has not been factored into the budget figures but it could be included as more additional income is found. Officers are working to bring in external funding where possible.
55. In summary Members were informed that there was a net cost of £100,000 for Talkin Tarn and re-charges amounted to £82,600 and with the general underspend that left a balance of approximately £10,000 cost to the Council for the running of Talkin Tarn.
56. If Talkin Tarn was treated as a private business and only the annual ‘operating costs’ are considered, the Country Park is much closer to the cost neutral objective set out in the original business plan and Executive report
57. Even if Talkin Tarn closed the central recharges would still remain but would be re-allocated throughout the Council. Members were advised that so long as costs could be controlled the Tarn would more or less break even.

Open Discussion with Stakeholders

58. The Task Group held a meeting at Talkin Tarn on 11th March 2013 and invited a selection of locally based individuals to find out their views of the Tarn.
59. Representatives attended from Brampton Parish Council, Brampton Tourist Information Centre, Talkin Tarn Rowing Club and a City Council Ward Councillor.
60. Participants were told that the City Council welcomed new ideas and opportunities but they must be achievable within the very limited resources available.
61. Key issues discussed and points raised at the meeting:
 - Main strength of the Tarn was its location but questioned whether the marketing was right.
 - Many local people enjoyed the simplicity of the Tarn as a place to relax. There needed to be a balance of retaining that atmosphere and creating income streams.
 - Biggest complaint was regarding the cost of the car parking and the tea rooms and there is an argument that a more reasonable price would attract more local people. Currently most local people had lunch in Brampton or at home instead of at the Tarn.
 - Concerns were raised that the tea room did not offer anything different to other tea rooms and the key to the tea rooms being successful was variety and providing a different offer to customers. The tea room would have to be more of a special place or treat to validate the car parking charges. It was suggested that special Sunday lunches could be a good offer.
 - That the tea room was not open long enough especially in the summer.
 - Many parents of children involved in the Rowing Club did not stay and use the facilities whilst their child attended the club.
 - Brampton TIC staff indicated that they were asked about the Tarn on a regular basis but walkers without transport often felt that the Tarn was too far to walk from Brampton. The transport links to the Tarn were very poor and without a car many could not use the Tarn especially in the evenings.
 - There is acknowledgement that many hundreds of people pass through Brampton Railway Station every week and advertising and/or signposting at the Station would be useful.
 - Local people did not want to pay to use the Tarn and as a result parked outside the Tarn on the road which caused a number of problems.
 - Suggestion that the ticket from the car parking machines be amended to highlight the 'donation' to the maintenance of the Tarn and other members of the Group suggested that a discount voucher for the Tea Room be added to the back of the ticket to discourage people to pass their tickets over and to encourage them to visit the Tea Room.
 - There is a very wide age range of people visited the Tarn especially at the weekend but there was still a low number of young people visiting.
 - Suggestion of free parking at certain times to encourage visitors to come walking at the Tarn and support the Council's healthy lifestyle priorities.

- More use could be made of the BIG Newsletter produced by Brampton Parish Council to promote the Tarn.
 - The Parish Council was in the process of producing a booklet on local walks and would ensure that the Tarn was included in the booklet.
 - The Ward Member suggested that the charges be varied for local people and the TIC representative suggested that local people who have purchased an annual ticket be given other incentives such as coffee mornings so they felt they were getting more for their money.
 - Suggestion that dog trainers or classes for dogs could be put on at the Tarn with refreshments included to encourage people to attend.
62. With regard to the Tea Room, Members were informed that as custom to the Tarn was predominantly weather dependent the Tea Room tried to ensure that there was as little waste as possible from the menu. The weather also could dictate people's menu choices and the tea room tried to ensure all costs were covered.
63. The Tea Room had trialled different trading hours, included later opening hours on Rowing Club nights, but this had not been successful. Theme nights had also been experimented previously but again had been hard to sell. Although there was not any initial objection to Sunday lunches these would require planning and appropriate advertising, tables would need to be pre-booked as food would need to be ordered specially.
64. General advertising that was available for the Tarn including the internet and a general leaflet that was provided to local TIC's. Members were informed that there was a very limited budget for marketing and although discussions had taken place with the Council's Communication Team marketing could not be improved without additional resources.
65. The Group were reminded that the charges for the car park would be increasing in April and a small notice had been added to the car parking machines informing customers that the fee for the car park went directly to the maintenance of the Tarn.

Conclusions

67. As noted earlier in the report the Task Group was appointed primarily to gain an understanding of the budget of Talkin Tarn. Members were informed that in 2012/13 there was a net cost of £100,000 for Talkin Tarn and re-charges amounted to £82,600 and with the general underspend that left a balance of approximately £10,000 cost to the Council for the running of Talkin Tarn. Due to the particularly bad weather last year visitors to the Tarn and income for the Tarn was reduced.
68. Members were informed that during the course of this work a separate review on the recharges for Talkin Tarn was undertaken and that as a result of this work the central recharges will reduce to £54,800 in 2013/14.
69. Members of the Task Group are supportive of this reduction as it was the general consensus of the group that the recharges previously for the Tarn were excessive. **The Group will not be making any recommendations with regard to Central Recharges as they agree that appropriate action has now been taken.**
70. However the Group are aware that Talkin Tarn needs to attract more income in order to have a surplus on the budget which can be reinvested in maintenance and future development.
71. The Task Group were informed of several potential income streams for the Tarn, including a watersports franchise. Members agree that the offer at the Tarn needs to be improved in order to attract more visitors who will stay longer. This would have a positive impact on income from both parking and the Tea Room.
72. The Group are particularly eager about the possibilities of franchising activities at the Tarn including Watersports (which is currently advertised for tender) and possibly a tree top outdoor activity. The Task Group agree that these possibilities would give the Tarn an offer which would attract a wider customer base whilst keeping sympathetic to the natural surroundings of the Country Park. **The Task Group encourage the Executive to support the Directorate in pursuing the potential of these initiatives and will be making a recommendation to this effect.**

Recommendation 1

That the Executive support the Officers within the Directorate in pursuing potential franchise initiatives which could be accommodated at Talkin Tarn. This should attract a wider customer base whilst remaining sensitive to the natural surroundings of the Country Park.

73. Members are concerned that the reduction in staffing could hinder any development at the Tarn. It has been made clear throughout the review that staff numbers within the Green Spaces Team has reduced including the deletion of the post of Talkin Tarn Manager and therefore there are not the resources available to devote to the development of the Tarn.
74. The Group are concerned that the details of the Talkin Tarn Membership scheme have not developed in line with budget proposals and make a recommendation that this is addressed as soon as possible. i.e. that it could include annual parking, vouchers for the Cafe, a small number of day permits for fishing or water sports, access to members only events, a "Christmas Shopper" one day parking permit for the City and a newsletter to show which

projects at the Tarn are in benefit of the membership revenue.⁶ Members welcomed the offer from Parish Council representatives to use their newsletter to promote the Tarn and suggest that this is used to promote the Membership scheme, with perhaps a competition running alongside for an Annual Membership.

Recommendation 2

Members recommend that details of the scheme are finalised and marketed as soon as possible in order to attract users of the Tarn to the scheme. Consideration should be given to advertising within Brampton Parish Council's BIG newsletter.

75. Members agree that the Neighbourhood and Green Spaces Team provide an excellent service but are concerned that the Team Manager has a current Green Spaces Officer post vacant and therefore is under extreme pressure to manage over 30 green spaces, including Talkin Tarn with only one other member of staff.
76. Members of the Environment and Economy O&S Panel received a presentation at their meeting on 17th January 2013 about the Carlisle Green Infrastructure Strategy⁷ which puts the gross value of the natural resources to the city of Carlisle at £25 billion over the next 50 years. Members were informed that "this infrastructure needs to be managed and maintained if it is to continue to provide this level of benefit". Given this evidence the Task Group will make a recommendation that the vacant post is filled as soon as possible.

Recommendation 3

Members of the Task Group recommend that the vacant Green Spaces Officer post is recruited to as soon as possible.

77. Members do not make this recommendation lightly and understand the budgetary pressures of the Council but a clear steer as to the future expectations for the Tarn needs to be given and acknowledgement that resources need to be allocated in order to reap benefits for the Tarn and other Green Spaces in the District. Continuing raising parking charges will eventually have a negative impact on visitor numbers which in turn will have an effect on other income streams.
78. Members are concerned that some visitors to the Tarn park on the roadside to avoid parking charges. This can be dangerous on a small country road and **consideration needs to be given how this can be minimised.**
79. Throughout this work Members have continuously come back to the Tea Room offer. There are arguments that the opening times are not long enough but later opening hours have been trialled and proved unsuccessful. Members are informed that the weather has a massive impact on visitor numbers and it is not possible to open ad hoc if there is a spell of good weather.
80. There are suggestions for Sunday Lunches and Members agree **that this would be worthy of further investigation**, however should the Tarn expect people to pay for parking to have their lunch? **Consideration needs to be given to providing a parking permit with a lunch booking.**

⁶ LE34/12 Review of Charges 2013/14 Local Environment

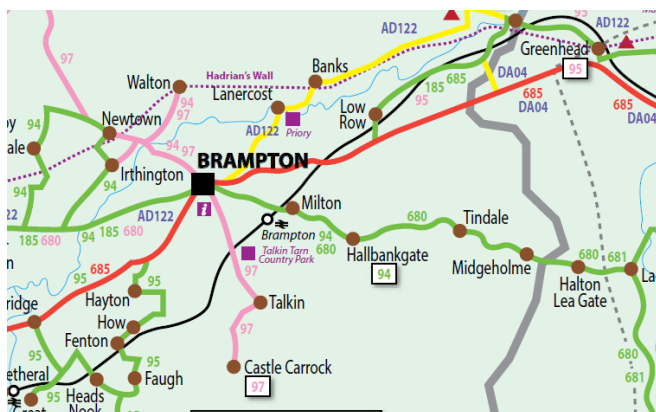
⁷ LE03/13 Use of Green Infrastructure "Green Infrastructure Strategy for Carlisle (Carlisle – Big Green City) 17th January 2013

81. Members have been informed that the Tea Room makes a modest profit on a usual year before central recharges. However these charges cannot be ignored and are part of the cost of the service. Although the costs are to be reduced in 2013/14, Members agree that the whole offer of the Tea Room and Gift Shop should be reviewed in order to attract more custom. This review should include consideration to the option of franchising the Tea Room.

Recommendation 4

That the whole offer of the Tea Room and Gift Shop should be reviewed in order to attract more custom. This review should include consideration to the option of franchising the Tea Room.

82. Members agree that the Tarn is a beautiful natural area which the Council should be proud of. They do agree that the Tarn is not marketed well and links to public transport are not as good as they could be. A clear marketing strategy needs to be developed with support from the Policy and Communications Section who receive a recharge from the Talkin Tarn budget for services.
83. With regard to public transport the Brampton to Castle Carrock (97) route does have a stop at



the Tarn Road End but only runs to the Tarn on a Wednesday and Friday which arrives at 0850 and 1331 and from the Tarn at 1345 on the same days.⁸ If the offer at the Tarn was to develop then approaches should be made to determine whether the frequencies of buses could be increased. Members would encourage officers to continue with their enquiries to advertise the Tarn on local buses.

84. An approach should also be made to National Rail to advertise and signpost the walking route to Talkin Tarn from Brampton Railway Station.

Recommendation 5

That a strategy for the marketing and promotion of Talkin Tarn is undertaken with support from officers within the Policy and Communications Section

Recommendation 6

That officers continue to pursue enquiries with local public transport providers to promote Talkin Tarn Country Park in order to attract more visitors and provide adequate transport links.

⁸ Cumbria Passenger Transport Map – Integrated Transport Team, Cumbria County Council

EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON 8 MAY 2013

EEOSP.27/13 TALKIN TARN

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.11/13 that included a draft report of the Talkin Tarn Task and Finish group. Four meetings of the Task and Finish Group had been held that included consultation with Officers from the Green Spaces team, the Chief Accountant, stakeholders and a meeting to share findings with the Portfolio Holder.

The report outlined the conclusions and offered a number of recommendations that the Executive were requested to consider and respond.

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

A Member believed that the shortfall of £10,000 was not a huge amount if the Tarn was to be of benefit to the people of Carlisle.

A Member, who had been a member of the Task Group, reminded Members that the report was draft and provided a series of recommendations to the Executive. He acknowledged that the central charges were to be reduced. The Council needed to look at the development potential of the Tarn. There was scope for improvement in the marketing strategy and that could be achieved by better advertising, media and use of the Council's Communications team. It was also necessary to make the Tarn more accessible from Brampton station as a survey undertaken 3-4 years previously had determined that there were a large number of visitors from the North East so that should be looked at as part of the catchment area. There was no specific transport to the Tarn at present so the Member requested that Officers look at whether present bus routes could be extended or whether an individual operator would be willing to run "summer specials".

The Member also suggested that Officers look again at the performance of the tea room and outlined the options indicated within the report. The Member believed that the poor performance over the previous 2 years had been due to bad weather.

The Chairman invited Councillor Allison, who had also been a Member of the Task Group for his input. Councillor Allison stated that he had enjoyed working on the Group but he was concerned about the central charges and the Blue Green algae. He suggested that the Tarn could be set up as a Trust or a wholly owned subsidiary of the Council.

A Member was opposed to the Tarn becoming a Trust but believed that the Tarn could be better used and suggested something along the lines of a country fair may be popular. Young people should also be encouraged to visit the Tarn and the Council should taken advantage of the proximity to Hadrian's Wall and Brampton station. The Member also suggested mystery tours to the Tarn could be reinstated. He believed that the Tarn was a benefit to the community but more could be done by working with the community.

A Member pointed out that the cost to the Council to maintain the Tarn was £35 per day and that the Tarn was a valuable asset. The Member queried whether the Tarn was included in the events profile and suggested it could be part of the Events City and Brampton folk scene.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that there had been events at the Tarn in the past and reminded Members that an outside event staged at the Tarn last year had been a wash-out while a similar event the previous year had attracted 1,000 visitors. He agreed that Officers could integrate the Tarn with regard to events but reminded Members that there was often a cost to stage events. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that it was important to maintain a balance between the tranquillity of the Tarn and the number of events.

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder agreed that the Tarn could be a possible venue for future events and suggested that it could also be marketed as a venue for outside events. The Portfolio Holder suggested that, in light of the poor summers over the previous 2 years, things may not be as bad as they appeared. She confirmed that the central charges were to be reduced and commended the Working Group on the level of detail undertaken.

With regard to Brampton station the Portfolio Holder believed that it could not be compared to Penrith as it was not in the town itself and usually only carried commuters rather than tourists. Marketing would be required but it would be difficult. The Portfolio Holder stated that the local residents were aware of the Tarn but would return home for refreshments rather than have a coffee in the tea room. She suggested that a marketing strategy would be useful but it was important that the Tarn was not overwhelmed. The Portfolio Holder agreed that the performance of the tea room needed to be looked at and reminded Members that the Council had invested money to ensure the future of the facility. The report provided a lot of food for thought and some recommendations had been well researched.

A Member suggested that the Council should recruit a Business Manager to look at obtaining grants for the Tarn. He believed that it would be better to have someone with a business background.

The Chairman advised that the Task Group had not come to that conclusion and highlighted Recommendation 3 of the report that suggested that the vacancy for a Green Spaces Officer be filled as soon as possible to allow the Site Manager more time to manage the Tarn.

The Director of Local Environment advised that 2 years ago, before the reduction in the grant from the County Council there was a Business Manager in post at the Tarn and she had brought the Tarn up to the standard of other open spaces within the City Council. When funding ended that post was withdrawn and the role was covered by the Green Spaces officer and Site Management Team Leader who explored grant funding and income streams.

The Member also praised the City council for restoring the Tarn to its present state.

A Member stated that the Tarn End hotel had had potential at the time of the purchase but it was now derelict.

A Member believed that the tea room was under achieving in respect of the overall income achieved. In 2006 an Overview and Scrutiny Panel had suggested that closing the tea room at 4:30 was inadequate and that 11:00 until 5:00 would be more appropriate. A review of the opening hours was a recommendation within the report.

A Member stated that it would have been better if the hotel had been included in the purchase of the Tarn but the County Council refused. Income and activities at the Tarn was weather dependent and it was not helpful that in good weather part of the amenity closed early. With regard to advertising that needed to be further afield as local people knew about the Tarn. The Member made no apologies for the car parking charges. People from Newcastle and Hexham had complained about the charges but the Member did not agree with local people paying for an amenity that was accessed by people from outside the district.

The Member agreed that the previous Talkin Tarn Manager had done a good job in turning the site around but stated that people had to be more business minded but be mindful that they did not spoil the character of the Tarn. The Manager had brought in people who engaged in crafts such as wood turning. These were offered a small pitch to show off their crafts and there was no cost to the public. Those events could be put on again and would be environmentally acceptable.

There were also events where the car park was taken over for storage of boats which led to cars being forced to park on the grass. Because they were not on the car park there was no income from those cars. The Member suggested that in future the boats should park on the grass and leave the car park available for cars.

A Member suggested again that the first recommendation be amended to include the recruitment of a Business Manager for the Tarn.

The Portfolio Holder advised that there was information that explained how the costs for Talkin Tarn were apportioned. She agreed that the matter could be discussed with the Executive and while the answer may be a negative one the Member would be given the reason why the post of Business Manager at the Tarn was not possible.

A Member stated that the Group had worked hard and had a wide cross section of Councillors who had come up with some recommendations. The Group had consulted with a lot of people as part of the work and he believed it would be inappropriate to alter the Group's recommendations.

Following a vote Members of the Panel agreed the Task Group's recommendations without any amendments.

RESOLVED: (1) That Report OS.11/13 – Talkin Tarn report be noted and the recommendations be submitted to the Executive for their consideration and response.

(2) That the implementation of the recommendations be monitored over the coming year.