



INFRASTRUCTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 13TH DECEMBER 2001

Title: ASSEMBLY ROOM, OLD TOWN HALL

Report of: HEAD OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Report reference: EDU.43/01

Summary:

To consider the usage of the Assembly Room.

Recommendations:

Contact Officer: John Bell

Ext: 7160

To: The Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 13th December 2001.**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The need for a review of the use of the Assembly Room has been identified in the Council's approved Tourism Development Plan 2000/2001. As a result a report was submitted to Economic Development Sub-Committee in August 2000 suggesting ways in which its facilities could be improved and its usage and income increased. This report is attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.2 Members approved the report and authorised officers to prepare a more detailed scheme for their consideration. This has led to the preparation of three outline schemes, which are available as examples of how the Assembly Room could be improved whilst satisfying the criteria laid down within the Report in Appendix 1: namely – increasing income and usage, maintaining the integrity of a Grade I Listed Building and continuing its use for community groups. These will be displayed at Committee.

2.0 DETAILS OF USAGE

- 2.1 A detailed analysis of the usage of the Assembly Room is set out in Appendix 2, along with current charges and annual income figures.
- 2.2 The majority of bookings are at the reduced rate, with almost half of these representing coffee morning sessions. Full commercial bookings are still hard to attract. The main reasons for this appear to be the absence of on-site parking, limited space with no additional meeting rooms available and limited ancillary equipment in comparison to alternative larger hotel venues.

3.0 MARKETING

- 3.1 The Assembly Room is marketed as a meeting/conference venue through the Carlisle Conference Group, via its attractive brochure and annual programme of marketing activity, which includes extensive mail outs and exhibition attendance.
- 3.2 Regular (annual) mail outs are also sent to potential local community group users to promote the venue as a community facility.

4.0 SUMMARY

- 4.1 Over the last three years (98/99 – 2000/2001) there has been on average 355 bookings per year, (269 paying bookings) which represents only 32% of total sessions available. Whilst annual bookings have increased over this same period by 55% the Assembly Room has the capacity to accommodate a much higher level of usage.
- 4.2 Marketing activity could be increased but this will require increased funding when income levels are already low. As a meeting facility it cannot provide the advantages which are to be found in other local hotel venues. The Assembly Room is a valued facility for community groups but these provide limited income and coffee morning bookings for 2002 are moving towards Saturdays only.
- 4.3 The improvement schemes already prepared, or some elements thereof, may provide a possible way forward in stimulating better future usage but this would require funding, which is not available in any existing budget.

APPENDIX 1

EDU.45/00

TO: THE CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
SUB-COMMITTEE

ASSEMBLY ROOM

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Old Town Hall is a prominent attractive Grade 1 listed building in a prime city centre location. It houses the Carlisle Visitor Centre which includes the successful Tourist Information Centre which has operated since 1990 and which has recently won the "**Cumbria for Excellence**" award as Best Tourist Information Centre in Cumbria. The average annual throughput of "customers" is 184,679 see Appendix 1.
- 1.2 It is a popular information facility and provides an information service which enjoys high satisfaction among its users.
- 1.3 It also accommodates the Assembly Room which operates as a meetings and coffee morning venue and exhibition and educational facility. It is used by over 160 local bodies, community groups and organisations and is an extremely popular venue for charity fund raising activities such as coffee mornings. In spite of this the facility is very much underused. Over the last six years the average annual bookings figure is 233 which represents approximately 25 per cent of the total sessions available. A full breakdown of usage and income is shown in Appendix 3.
- 1.4 Given this situation this report is aimed at examining realistic ways in which the usage and income in the Assembly Room, which is in a prime city centre location can be significantly increased.

2.0 BRIEF

The brief for the report is to:

- 2.1 Increase the usage and income of the Assembly Room in particular and the Carlisle Visitor Centre in general.
- 2.2 Maintain the integrity of the Old Town Hall as an historic Grade 1 Listed Building and enhance it as a visitor destination and attraction in its own right.

- 2.3 Take full account of the valuable contribution the Assembly Room makes to local community groups for fund raising activity and meetings.

3.0 **OUTLINE PROPOSALS**

3.1 **Retention of Space for Community Groups and Charities**

The benefit and value of providing space for community groups and charitable organisations is very much appreciated by the City Council. As such it is felt that any proposal to improve the Assembly Room's usage and income earning potential should cater within it for the continued provision of coffee mornings and meetings at discretionary rates for charity and community groups.

3.2 **Proposals to Increase Daily Usage of the Assembly Room**

Whilst the Assembly Room is a traditional and valuable asset for the local community it is not fulfilling its potential as a prime city centre located facility. It needs to take much better advantage of the high daily footfall associated with both the Tourist Information Centre in particular, and the city centre in general, and provide a means of generating a much more lucrative income for the facility.

3.2.1 **Options Which Were Examined and Discounted were:**

- (i) commercial use as offices and coffee shop extension
- (ii) a satellite gallery for Tullie House
- (iii) community art/exhibition gallery

Option (i) was considered unsuitable because it would have completely precluded the use of the Assembly Room for community groups, as well as the practical difficulties involved with shared access and facilities with the adjoining Tourist Information Centres.

Options (ii) and (iii) had similar implications for community use and they also represented a duplication, and possible conflict, with the proposals for the Millennium Gallery.

3.2.2 (iv) Recommended Option : Permanent Exhibition and Audio Visual Show

Exhibition

The location of the Assembly Room, next door to the Tourist Information Centre and at the focal point of the city centre and its pedestrian routes, presents a major opportunity to provide a "shop window" for Carlisle where the City's key attractions and facilities could be powerfully interpreted and presented.

Such an exhibition would provide an imaginative and entertaining introduction to Carlisle's tourism product and encourage both visitors and locals to visit the attractions and facilities displayed.

Detailed design and themes would follow the approval of this outline proposal. The exhibition however could usefully interpret the City's "heritage" in such a way as to promote key historic attractions along with Tullie House and the Millennium Gallery. Other aspects such as Civic Pride and the City's built and rural environment could also be incorporated.

Content could also include interpreted three dimensional objects on loan from the various attractions and organisations, as well as graphic panels introducing the visitors to Carlisle's "story". This could be changed on a regular basis, with particular emphasis on local interest during the off peak season. Care would be taken to ensure that the displays would not be in competition or conflict with those in the Millennium Gallery, Tullie House or other adjacent attractions.

Audio Visual Show

It is also proposed that the exhibition area include a small auditorium showing a re-edited version of the highly acclaimed "**The Story of Carlisle**" video. Using new equipment it will enable it to have a much greater impact on a larger screen. This will also complement the other interpretative features within the exhibition and together provide a very comprehensive and attractive profile of Carlisle. (The new video can of course also be used as part of marketing initiatives to bring tour and travel operators, to the city). The new video facilities will also allow other selected railway and local promotional videos to be shown on a rotational basis, and stimulate use by specialist groups in the evenings.

4.0 ACCOMMODATING COMMUNITY GROUPS AND THE PROPOSED EXHIBITION WITHIN THE ASSEMBLY ROOM

- 4.1 The proposed design and layout of the exhibition and auditorium will be done in such a way to allow sufficient flexibility to enable space to be available for coffee mornings and meetings. However the operational schedule of the Assembly Room will need to change in order to accommodate both the exhibition and community use. The most frequent and regular demand for bookings from community groups and charities is undoubtedly related to Friday and Saturday mornings and the fundraising coffee mornings, which have been a feature of the "city centre scheme" for many years. The demand for meetings is less pronounced, and less focussed.
- 4.2 With regard to the proposed exhibition and audio visual show it can only function effectively if it has recognised daily openings and dedicated session time throughout the week.
- 4.3 It is therefore recommended that a practical operational programme is put in place in the Assembly Room which would more accurately reflect the demand from community groups as well as allow the effective operation of a daily revenue earning exhibition facility.
- 4.4 The recommended operational schedule is as follows.

Sun-Thurs	10.00 a.m. – 4.00 p.m.	Exhibition/A V Show
Fri-Sats	10.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m.	Community Use
Fri-Sats	1.00 p.m. - 4.00 p.m.	Exhibition/A V Show
Evenings		Community Use

* Times shown are as a guide only and can be adjusted accordingly.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Estimated expenditure and income associated with the recommended proposals will be provided in a detailed report, which will follow subject to the approval of this outline paper.

6.0 **SUMMARY**

- 6.1 The report recognises the need to significantly increase the use of the Assembly Room which is located in a prime city centre location.
- 6.2 It also recognises the opportunity to increase income at the same time.
- 6.3 The value and benefit of the Assembly Room to community groups and charities and the need to retain space for their use is also clearly acknowledged.
- 6.4 The report recommends the provision of a high quality interpretative exhibition (including an audio visual show) which will act as 'a shop window for Carlisle' and encourage visitors and locals alike to visit the City's key attractions and facilities. A modest entry fee would be charged for admission.
- 6.5 The proposed exhibition is seen as an enhancement to the function of the Visitor Centre and a means of encouraging an even larger number and greater cross section of visitors to the building.
- 6.6 Whilst becoming a more attractive visitor destination in its own right the Assembly Room should not be seen in direct competition with other attractions. It will enable the Visitor Centre to become a much more effective orientation centre where the new exhibition will be designed to be an effective catalyst for directing visitors to the City's key attractions. Its scale and content should attract visits of approximate 1 hour duration, which will be ideal introductory period to Carlisle's tourism product, and should not inhibit visits to other attractions and facilities. It should also prove attractive to locals, engendering "civic pride" and providing a valuable educational facility.
- 6.7 The operational schedule of the Assembly Room would need to be revised to accommodate both the exhibition and community uses. See Section 4.4.

7.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- (i) approve in principle the recommendations contained above
- (ii) authorise officers to prepare a detailed scheme and report back to a future meeting with the details of the proposed content, layout, operation and cost implications.

- (iii) authorise officers to consult and liaise with current users of the Assembly Room during the preparation of the scheme so that all the proposed uses can be incorporated and accommodated in the most practical and harmonious fashion.

David Beaty

Acting Head of Economic Development.

Contact Officer: John Bell

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ASSEMBLY ROOM
OLD TOWN HALL

ANALYSIS OF YEARLY FIGURES

MONTH	1998/1999					1999/2000					2000/2001					2001/2002				
	Full	Red	In House	Free	Total	Full	Red	In House	Free	Total	Full	Red	In House	Free	Total	Full	Red	In House	Free	Total
April	4	13	2	13	32	4	12	1	6	23	0	39	1	4	44	0	17	4	3	24
May	3	16	4	6	29	0	16	2	7	25	5	29	6	10	50	0	17	1	6	24
June	1	16	3	5	25	5	16	4	11	36	0	14	5	4	23	1	20	3	6	30
July	1	11	2	8	22	1	18	2	9	30	1	11	2	48	62	0	4	2	41	47
August	1	11	0	5	17	2	10	2	7	21	2	12	0	41	55	0	9	2	0	11
September	0	17	4	3	24	0	14	6	7	27	17	20	3	1	41	7	19	5	1	32
October	1	22	4	7	34	0	18	2	3	23	26	18	3	4	51	0	25	0	2	27
November	0	19	1	7	27	2	17	3	5	27	4	23	2	5	34					
December	1	10	1	3	15	0	12	1	2	15	0	14	2	2	18					
January	5	13	0	3	21	0	12	3	2	17	4	12	6	1	23					
February	9	11	0	5	25	2	15	5	2	24	16	12	4	2	34					
March	0	17	1	8	26	0	29	7	3	39	7	15	6	0	28					
Total	26	176	22	73	297	16	189	38	64	307	82	219	40	122	463	8	111	17	59	195

Key to Bookings

- 1 Full Full commercial Booking Rate
- 2 Red Reduced rate for registered charities, OAP groups, Other community groups
- 3 In House Reduced rate (as per 2) for departments of the City Council
- 4 Free No charge for meetings/exhibitions involving Tourism Unit and Economic Development Unit of the City Council

The Assembly Room
 Carlisle Tourist Information Centre
 Old Town Hall
 Carlisle

ANALYSIS OF ASSEMBLY ROOM HIRE 1999-2000

MONTH	FULL			REDUCTION			IN-HOUSE			FREE			TOTAL SESSIONS	NUMBER BUFFET	COFFEE		AV USE	
	AM	PM	EV	AM	PM	EV	AM	PM	EV	AM	PM	EV			PAID	FREE	PAID	FREE
APRIL	2	2	0	10	0	2	1	0	0	3	3	0	23	0	4	4	1	0
MAY	0	0	0	10	2	4	0	1	1	4	3	0	25	0	2	4	0	2
JUNE	4	1	0	11	3	2	1	3	0	5	5	1	36	2	11	3	5	7
JULY	0	0	1	13	4	1	2	0	0	4	5	0	30	1	4	1	2	4
AUGUST	1	1	0	8	1	1	1	1	0	5	2	0	21	1	4	0	0	0
SEPTEMBER	0	0	0	6	3	5	2	3	1	4	2	1	27	3	6	2	5	1
OCTOBER	0	0	0	11	2	5	1	1	0	2	1	0	23	1	3	3	0	0
NOVEMBER	1	1	0	9	2	6	2	1	0	1	4	0	27	1	7	2	4	0
DECEMBER	0	0	0	6	2	4	1	0	0	0	1	1	15	2	1	2	0	0
JANUARY	0	0	0	6	2	4	1	1	1	0	2	0	17	1	3	2	2	2
FEBRUARY	1	1	0	7	3	5	2	3	0	1	1	0	24	1	15	2	10	0
MARCH	0	0	0	14	8	7	3	4	0	2	1	0	39	3	11	2	4	0
TOTAL	9	6	1	111	32	46	17	18	3	31	30	3		16	71	27	33	16

The Assembly Room
 Carlisle Tourist Information Centre
 Old Town Hall
 Carlisle

ANALYSIS OF ASSEMBLY ROOM HIRE 2000-2001

MONTH	FULL			REDUCTION			IN-HOUSE			FREE			TOTAL SESSIONS	NUMBER BUFFET	COFFEE		AV USE	
	AM	PM	EV	AM	PM	EV	AM	PM	EV	AM	PM	EV			PAID	FREE	PAID	FREE
APRIL	0	0	0	22	15	2	0	1	0	2	2	0	44	0	1	3	0	0
MAY	3	2	0	14	12	3	2	1	3	5	4	1	50	4	17	1	9	1
JUNE	0	0	0	9	3	2	2	2	1	4	0	0	23	2	9	1	3	2
JULY	0	0	1	8	1	2	1	1	0	20	27	1	62	1	3	1	0	2
AUGUST	1	1	0	9	3	0	0	0	0	18	23	0	55	0	6	0	4	0
SEPTEMBER	8	9	0	12	6	2	0	2	1	1	0	0	41	1	17	1	8	0
OCTOBER	13	13	0	9	5	4	2	1	0	3	1	0	51	2	8	1	1	1
NOVEMBER	2	2	0	13	5	5	1	0	1	2	3	0	34	2	16	4	13	1
DECEMBER	0	0	0	7	4	3	0	1	1	2	0	0	18	0	2	2	1	1
JANUARY	2	2	0	5	4	3	4	1	1	0	1	0	23	5	16	0	2	0
FEBRUARY	8	8	0	5	2	5	4	0	0	1	1	0	34	0	20	0	16	0
MARCH	4	3	0	10	1	4	3	3	0	0	0	0	28	0	14	0	5	0
TOTAL	41	40	1	123	61	35	19	13	8	58	62	2	463	17	129	14	62	8

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The Assembly Room
 Carlisle Tourist Information Centre
 Old Town Hall
 Carlisle

ANALYSIS OF ASSEMBLY ROOM HIRE 2001-2002

MONTH	FULL			REDUCTION			IN-HOUSE			FREE			TOTAL SESSIONS	NUMBER BUFFET	COFFEE		AV USE	
	AM	PM	EV	AM	PM	EV	AM	PM	EV	AM	PM	EV			PAID	FREE	PAID	FREE
APRIL	0	0	0	11	4	2	2	2	0	1	2	0	24	2	11	0	6	0
MAY	0	0	0	11	3	3	1	0	0	3	2	1	24	1	8	2	9	0
JUNE	0	1	0	14	3	3	0	2	1	3	3	0	30	2	7	0	2	0
JULY	0	0	0	3	0	1	1	1	0	20	19	2	47	1	6	1	2	0
AUGUST	0	0	0	8	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	11	1	2	0	0	0
SEPTEMBER	4	3	0	12	5	2	1	3	1	1	0	0	32	1	15	0	7	0
OCTOBER	0	0	0	14	7	4	0	0	0	2	0	0	27	1	10	0	4	6
NOVEMBER																		
DECEMBER																		
JANUARY																		
FEBRUARY																		
MARCH																		
TOTAL	4	4	0	73	22	16	6	8	3	30	26	3		9	59	3	30	6

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ASSEMBLY ROOM
OLD TOWN HALL
CARLISLE

REVENUE

YEAR	INCOME (£)
1998/1999	5108.50
1999/2000	5298.90
2000/2001	5951.23
2001/2002	3500.00

Up to end Nov 2001

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

OLD TOWN HALL VISITOR CENTRE

Assembly Room Hire

Charges per session as follows:

	<u>Charge</u> £	<u>Implementation</u> Date
Mornings 9.30 – 1.00	45.00	01/04/01
Afternoons 1.30 – 5.00	45.00	
Mornings & Afternoons 9.30 – 5.00	90.00	
Evenings 6.30 – 10.00	45.00	
Evenings 6.30 – Midnight	90.00	
Afternoons & Evenings 1.30 – 10.00	90.00	
Each additional hour	15.00	
Charge for use of - kitchen	15.00	
- audio visual exp.	15.00	
- screen or speakers	7.50	

N.B. For uses by the following groups and organisations discounts of 62.5% for Mornings/Afternoons, 37.5% for Evenings and 50 % for double sessions including Evenings will be allowed:

- i. Registered Charities
- ii. O.A.P. Groups
- iii. Other community groups e.g. community organisations, unemployed groups etc.

ASSEMBLY ROOM
OLD TOWN HALL
CARLISLE

REVENUE

YEAR	INCOME (£)
1998/1999	5108.50
1999/2000	5298.90
2000/2001	5951.23
2001/2002	3500.00

Up to end Nov 2001