

**INFRASTRUCTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**(SPECIAL)**

**FRIDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2002 AT 10.00 AM**

PRESENT: Councillor C Rutherford (Chairman),  
Councillors Crookdake, Dodd, S Fisher (substitute for  
Councillor E Mallinson), Glover, B Hodgson, Martlew and  
Parsons.

ALSO PRESENT: Ms C Collier, Chief Executive, Cumbria  
Tourist Board;

Councillor G Prest (Infrastructure, Environment and  
Transport Portfolio Holder) attended part of the meeting  
and contributed to the discussion;

Councillor L Fisher attended part of the meeting as an  
observer.

**IOS.110/02 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs E Mallinson.

**IOS.111/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING  
DECLARATIONS OF THE PARTY WHIP)**

Councillor Mrs S Fisher declared a personal interest in accordance with the City Council's  
Code of Conduct for Members in respect of the Tourism Subject Review (IOS.112/02) in  
view of the nature of her business as a Guest House Proprietor.

**IOS.112/02 TOURISM SUBJECT REVIEW**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Ms Chris Collier, Chief Executive of Cumbria  
Tourist Board, who had been invited to attend the meeting to discuss matters relating to the  
promotion of tourism in Cumbria and the Carlisle area in particular. A report prepared by  
the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer (ME.01/02) providing the background to this  
subject review had been circulated to Members. The City Council's Tourism Manager was  
also in attendance at the meeting.

The purpose of the meeting was to consider the following areas of interest:-

- (a) To obtain a general understanding of tourism trends and tourism policy.
- (b) To discuss tourism in Cumbria and Carlisle.

(c) The work of Cumbria Tourist Board and the support offered to Carlisle.

(d) The significance of the North West Development Agency's involvement in tourism strategy for the region.

(e) The potential of the Rural Action Zone for tourism.

(f) The future direction of tourism in Carlisle.

*To open the discussion, the Chairman referred to the latest report into tourism which had recently received publicity in the media.*

Ms Collier gave details of this report, indicating that, based on accommodation occupancy levels, Cumbria was bucking the national trend in that the first quarter of 2002 had been the best year in Cumbria for five years. However, since the end of August 2002, this trend had not been sustained with November 2002 having been very quiet. It seemed unlikely that, at the end of 2002, occupancy levels would remain the best for five years.

There were differences in trading levels in various types of businesses. Good quality operators who provided value for money were doing well. One of the aims of the Cumbria Tourist Board was to encourage operators to upgrade facilities, given that quality was the defining factor for a successful business.

Ms Collier went on to talk about recent research into the brand "Cumbria – The Lake District" which sought to identify people's perceptions of the area. People recognised "The Lakes" more than "Cumbria" and they also recognised Carlisle better than Cumbria. People also knew of Hadrians Wall but many thought that Carlisle and Hadrians Wall were in Scotland. This provided useful information from which to consider branding for the area which was the subject of discussion with the North West Development Agency.

*The Chairman asked what the main trends in tourism were.*

Ms Collier indicated that more people were going overseas these days. Most areas in the UK were either flat or in decline but Cumbria was bucking the trend by holding its own or increasing tourism.

Attractions were not considered to be a good investment at the moment and people were looking for an experience rather than traditional museums.

Whilst Bed and Breakfast and Guest Houses were not performing very well, branded Hotels and the hotel sector in general were doing better. However, Bed and Breakfast and Guest Houses which provided a high level quality experience were doing well. This reflected changes in visitor demands over accommodation.

City Centre breaks were becoming more popular as was visiting friends and relatives.

There was a widening of the balance of payments deficit for tourism with, in particular, long haul visits in decline.

Recent data measuring the impact on the economy of the tourist industry suggested that Carlisle had traded satisfactorily in 2000 and that 2001 had been a good year for the City with the exception of the rural area. This had, in part, been as a result of the demand for accommodation from DEFRA, MAFF, etc in dealing with the foot and mouth outbreak. To

the end of June 2002, the figures were not as good as 2001 but still better than 2000.

It was a different situation in the rural area, although it was not easy to differentiate data at present.

*A Member asked whether lack of quality in accommodation represented a big challenge in Carlisle.*

Ms Collier indicated that many businesses in rural Carlisle had used capital to survive last year's Foot and Mouth outbreak and so had limited cash to invest this year. The type of added value item visitors were looking for nowadays included jacuzzi baths, swimming pools and private sitting rooms. This represented a significant step change for the industry. The Rural Action Zone was looking to target businesses with grants, although no grants for this type of improvement had been made to date. Grants for upgrading facilities were, however, available in Scotland.

*A Member asked how operators publicised the quality of their facilities in order to increased their trade.*

Ms Collier pointed out that visitors often made repeat visits if they enjoyed a particular establishment. The CTB also encouraged proprietors to enter various Awards Schemes. Word of mouth also played a part in publicising establishments.

*With regard to Rural Action Zone funding, a Member pointed out that operators still had to find 50% of any funding which was made available to them. Following the financial effect of the Foot and Mouth outbreak, this was difficult for these operators.*

Ms Collier considered that, in general, the industry had bounced back from the foot and mouth outbreak quicker than anyone had anticipated and many businesses were now in a position to invest. The CTB were interested in promoting "quality networks" for operators to encourage them to improve their facilities. The North West Development Agency was keen to work with groups of operators on this basis. Ms Collier stressed that visitor expectation in the UK was now for "added value" in accommodation like they experienced when abroad.

*A Member asked whether the "added value" issue was the greatest challenge.*

Ms Collier replied that there were a whole range of challenges but that getting quality right was the key to a successful business. Tourism was a mature industry in Cumbria. The history of the area was a strength which should also be profiled and pushed. There were always things to do in the area and research had shown that the word "inspiring" had been used by visitors and the fact that there was a different landscape every day. These words/phrases could be used in marketing to encourage visitors. It was important that a high quality product was available to attract visitors.

*A Member referred to the Foot and Mouth outbreak and the national media attention given to the area during and after the outbreak and opportunities for additional funding.*

Ms Collier considered that the area had a higher profile since the foot and mouth outbreak with awareness increased. The CTB had never refused requests for interviews during the Foot and Mouth outbreak and it had still been possible to show what was on offer in the Lake District and Cumbria.

Since Foot and Mouth, the marketing budget for CTB had been increased from £100,000 to

£1m a year and this was making a real impact on the ability to attract people to the area. Ms Collier contrasted this with the previous total overseas marketing budget of £25,000 per annum.

Having this extra marketing funding was making a difference. There was a loyalty shown through people's love for the area and the fact that many had missed not being able to visit for walking etc during the Foot and Mouth crisis. She also considered that many people visiting on business during the crisis had been impressed by the area and had returned for a break.

*A Member asked whether Carlisle got fair treatment in marketing for the area from the CTB.*

Ms Collier indicated that the major publication from CTB "Lake District" contained a two page spread every year on Carlisle which was subsidised by the tourism industry. She pointed out that the brand visitors were aware of was "The Lake District". The CTB were looking to brand "Cumbria – the Lake District" to remind people that the two were inter-linked. She believed that everything CTB did was on a County wide basis in terms of marketing. Recent independent research suggested that CTB marketing was neglecting the centre of the Lake District in favour of the "doughnut" around it.

The CTB had recently appointed two dedicated Officers for West Cumbria and also the Carlisle and Eden areas whose roles were to help these areas recover from the Foot and Mouth outbreak. She indicated that Kelly Smith had been appointed to work in the Carlisle and Eden area and she had developed a working relationship with the City Council's Tourism Unit. Her recent initiatives had included the Eden Valley circular cycle route, organising a customer profile for Carlisle and the Borderlands from which direct mail activities could result, arranging walking/cycling seminars, website promotions including a break in Carlisle as a prize, funding the "Love Labours Lost" banner advert for Tullie House as well as a range of other activities aimed at raising the profile of the Carlisle area.

In terms of the Rural Action Zone, the CTB had asked for £100,000 funding for each Local Authority in Cumbria for tourism initiatives. This had not been successful but the smaller amount that had been awarded had been used for marketing initiatives profiled around specific areas. Rural Carlisle had benefited from this funding and none had gone to initiatives in the Central Lakes.

Eden, Copeland and Rural Carlisle had been particularly badly hit by Foot and Mouth and specific sums had been allocated to encourage businesses to thrive once more. Ms Collier undertook to let the Overview and Scrutiny Officer have details of this funding.

*A Member asked whether there were marketing opportunities to encourage students' families to come to the area on visits. He also asked whether any investigations were currently being made into encouraging the conference trade in Carlisle.*

Ms Collier indicated that no specific marketing had been targeted in respect of students' families as it was considered that most of these families would visit anyway and that there would be limited gain from any marketing initiative. The CTB had done a campaign recently in conjunction with Coca Cola and Sprite in an attempt to target young people to come to the area.

On developing the conference trade, the NWDA Tourism Review had indicated that they wanted to make the North West area Number One for business. She agreed that there was a need for good quality business conference facilities in the Carlisle area. She also believed that development of Carlisle Airport would help businesses in Carlisle. She pointed out that

business tourism had overtaken hotel tourism in the UK. There were many companies taking employees/clients away on events which were high spending and had less impact on the environment. She saw huge opportunities for the area to develop businesses providing very high quality facilities for small groups to hold meetings in "off the beaten track" places. Business tourism was growing around airports and motorway network. This niche market for small groups could be developed in Carlisle.

*A Member asked whether there was a significant spend in this type of business tourism.*

Ms Collier indicated that there was a lot of spend on accommodation and food with restaurants, taxis etc doing well. People were often able to visit local places and purchased gifts to take home.

*A Member referred to Carlisle Airport and the fact that there had been no development at the Airport since it had been taken over by a private company.*

Ms Collier was of the opinion that the lack of development at the Airport had been a disappointment. She considered that there could be scope for Carlisle to be used as a low cost airline drop off point. She felt that there was a market for inbound tourism to this area and a link from London would be ideal. The CTB had not been included in any discussions or asked for advice on ways to develop the Airport.

Councillor G Prest (Infrastructure Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder) indicated that progress was being made on developing Carlisle Airport and he understood that improvements to the runway would be starting early next year. He too was disappointed with the speed at which improvements to the airport were being undertaken. He met regularly with the new owners of the Airport and would ask if the CTB could be represented at future discussions.

The City Council's Tourism Manager indicated that he had met the Manager of Carlisle Airport earlier in the year when they had been hopeful of developing links to destinations such as Luton, Belfast, Dublin and the Isle of Man. He had offered any assistance the Tourism Section could provide but no such request had since been made.

*A Member asked whether publicity and resources were being put into different areas chasing the same people.*

Ms Collier indicated that the CTB ran different campaigns throughout the year based on themes and activities. A Heritage Campaign would be important for Carlisle, other campaigns included golf, fishing, gardens and touring. She considered that these themed activity campaigns were useful as the destination did not matter to the enthusiasts interested in pursuing specific activities.

*A Member referred to Ms Collier's earlier comments that attractions were not a good investment at present. She pointed out that the City Council's firework display and other attractions in the City Centre did much to boost tourism in the area. The threat of terrorism in bigger cities was present in people's minds and, since the events of September 11, people were not flying in great numbers from the USA. She pointed out that the Castle and Cathedral also brought people to Carlisle. She was also aware of young people visiting Carlisle at weekends for the night life.*

Ms Collier accepted these points. She also referred to the possibility of developing the night life market in Carlisle to attract young people to Carlisle. This was a lucrative market and not seasonal. Young people had a high disposable income to spend on food and drink.

Ms Collier indicated that the City's base for tourism could continue to grow through the City Council's promotion of events in the City Centre and the development of top quality conference facilities although the City should be cautious with visitor attractions. These were becoming more and more prevalent and the market was saturated. With the rise in health and well being of people, the culture now was for a break to be for relaxation and rejuvenation rather than to be educated and entertained.

*A Member referred to self catering establishments in rural Carlisle and asked whether self catering in central Carlisle could be a possibility for developing.*

Ms Collier considered that there was potential for a limited amount of self catering accommodation in the centre of Carlisle as there was a trend towards longer breaks on a self catering basis. The Farm Tourism programme had received funding for the next 5 years. Care would need to be taken on this programme as the more farmers who diversified into tourism would limit the financial returns as visitors would be spread more thinly.

*A Member referred to the popularity of surfing at Allonby and indicated that the pubs and cafes in that area had not been improved to develop the attraction.*

Ms Collier considered that there may be scope for entrepreneurs to go in and drive up quality. There were problems in obtaining funding to do this, although the North West Development Agency were looking to upgrade standards in certain "gem" locations. She was looking to put forward Allonby as one of these locations.

*A Member asked about the potential to develop a tourism theme on the Arthurian Legend.*

Ms Collier considered that there was a wealth of potential to promote Legends but not the funding to market them all. Funding was concentrated on a specific few which could be expected to do well in attracting tourists and therefore provide the greatest return on marketing investment.

*A Member asked whether there was scope for a 4 star hotel in Carlisle connecting to a championship Golf Course.*

Ms Collier indicated that there was great potential in golfing in the County and currently there was a County Ticket for golfers which was promoted by the CTB. She considered that there was potential for quality accommodation to back up a championship level golf course in the area.

*A Member referred to other facilities which needed upgrading in Carlisle such as athletics facilities.*

Ms Collier indicated that the likelihood would be that it would be possible to attract one national athletics meeting a year and that upgrading athletics facilities would be more relevant to local people.

Ms Collier went on to refer to the Eden Project in south west England which had turned around the economic well being of the area.

She pointed out that there wasn't a Harry Potter Theme Park anywhere in the country.

Councillor G Prest indicated that a new hotel was being built as part of the Botchergate development. In addition, an application for planning permission for a hotel development at

Junction 43 of the M6 was to be considered at the next Development Control Committee. He also understood that two enquiries had been made regarding the potential for a 4 star hotel at Junction 44 of the M6. He further reported that there had been talk of an hotel at Carlisle Airport and the potential for a hotel/conference centre at the Airport as part of upgraded facilities could be a possibility.

With regard to the Arthurian legend, Councillor G Prest indicated that this had been promoted enthusiastically in Longtown for some time but had not caught on. Ms Collier considered that the Arthurian Legend was a specialist area and that only a small number of people would be interested. There would not be a big enough target market to justify a marketing initiative. She pointed out that Wordsworth was not a major attractor of visitors in the Lake District, although people would visit attractions connected to Wordsworth when they were in the area.

*With regard to branding, a Member asked whether "Carlisle and Hadrian's Wall" was to be promoted.*

Ms Collier confirmed that it was intended to use "Carlisle and Hadrian's Wall" along with a number of other "sub brands." The CTB were definitely of the opinion that the leading brands in Cumbria would be Lake District and Hadrian's Wall but that she was keen to develop "Carlisle and Hadrian's Wall". The North West Development Agency Review of Tourism may indicate that tourism should be marketed around a branding strategy of "The Lake District" and "Carlisle and Hadrian's Wall." However, if the elected North West Assembly comes to fruition, the whole map of the area could change and interim branding may not be appropriate at this stage. A CD ROM had been produced on the potential for a branding approach for tourism in the North West and Cumbria. Carlisle's specific attractions would be the Castle, Hadrian's Wall and the Cathedral.

The Tourism Manager indicated that tourism staff in Carlisle had a good working relationship with the CTB and considered that the City Council obtained value for money from their services for which the City Council contributed £3,000 a year. The CTB had produced useful research and studies in the past few years which had been used to encourage tourism in Carlisle. The biggest problem for Carlisle was the lack of resources to develop a profile. With regard to the branding issue, the North West Development Agency's Vision for Tourism was being developed and they were likely to take a more clinical approach with Lake District and Hadrian's Wall being the major brands. Whilst the City Council did get two pages in the Lake District publication, this did little to identify Carlisle with the Lake District. He agreed with Ms Collier that quality of accommodation/service was absolutely fundamental to the success of the tourism industry in Carlisle and considered that the City could build on promoting attractions within the City Centre pedestrianised area, the Carlisle to Settle railway and Hadrian's Wall.

Ms Collier considered that branding on the basis of Historic Carlisle - Gateway to the Lakes could be considered.

The Tourism Manager considered that the Heritage theme for marketing was one which should be encouraged. He also considered that the City Council would appreciate more attention on familiarisation visits which were often carried out in relation to the Central Lakes.

Ms Collier indicated that the CTB did attempt to get journalists to explore "undiscovered Cumbria" outside of the Central Lakes area although it was often difficult to achieve this. A new Press Officer started with the CTB on 12 December 2002 who was a former Head of PR for the BBC. The postholder would be seeking to promote all of Cumbria to the media.

*A Member referred to advertising space in the Lake District publication pointing out that there were many more advertisements for Central Lakes accommodation and attractions.*

Ms Collier stated that nobody got a different deal on advertising. There were many more tourism based businesses in the Central Lakes and, therefore, more advertisers.

The Lake District publication did not target specific areas but had pages on food and drink, history/culture, etc.

The CTB advertised Cumbria in national newspapers around Christmas/New Year time and in the National Trust magazine. The Lake District publication was available at the TIC network nationally and 60 key TIC's were targeted. The publication cost £1 and the CTB allowed TIC's to sell and keep the proceeds. This helped to ensure that the Lake District publication was on racks in TIC's and the revenue helped TIC's to survive. The CTB were also developing an integrated approach to marketing with postcards inserted in key publications or sent to target groups by direct mail. Lakeland Limited and Hawkshead Clothing also sent out postcards for the CTB as part of their mail order business from time to time. The CTB also did e-mail campaigns.

*A Member referred to the Castle Records Office which was always busy and asked whether this would be worth developing for genealogy.*

Ms Collier indicated that CTB had run a campaign on genealogy aimed at the USA. There were current difficulties in attracting American visitors back to this country since the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. The £25,000 overseas marketing budget made it difficult to change the situation. In any event, genealogy was a declining market because of the availability of information on the Internet nowadays.

*A Member referred to the East Cumbria Countryside Commission which did good work in Cumbria on repairing footpaths.*

Ms Collier indicated that the Countryside Agency in the past had not had a dialogue with the CTB. This had now improved and the Countryside Agency had now funded a Sustainable Transport Officer in conjunction with the CTB.

*A Member referred to environmental issues in the Lake District such as traffic impacts and asked for the latest position on proposals to charge people to take cars into parts of the Lake District or increase the availability of public transport in the Lake District.*

Ms Collier indicated that traffic count data suggested that visitor traffic was in decline and that, in any event, visitors did not see traffic congestion as a problem in the Lake District compared to other areas. The CTB had appointed a Sustainable Transport Officer to promote public transport. It was intended to develop a swipe card for use on all forms of transport within the Lake District.

The Officer was also promoting cycling and ways to encourage people to explore and disperse across Cumbria. A number of smaller locations were being profiled linked to public transport.

Ms Collier further reported that there was still a huge problem with the Highways Authority over the use of brown signs, with signage on motorways being essential to attract people. The Highways Authority view was that there was a problem with signage clutter, although elsewhere in the country this was not considered to be a problem with regional and sub-



regional attractions being sign posted from motorways.

*A Member referred to the poor quality of some public houses in the Lake District and whether steps could be taken to improve standards.*

Ms Collier stated that many pubs in the Lake District did not believe that they were in tourism. There were current problems with the condition of roads, poor marketing, road signs and poor WC's in the Central Lakes, although the accommodation on offer was fairly good quality. The Foot and Mouth outbreak had made a difference to many businesses and their perception had now changed and they now accepted that they were part of the tourism industry.

*A Member referred to Cumbria bucking the trend on accommodation. In 2001 the trend would have been high because of the DEFRA people dealing with the Foot and Mouth outbreak. They had only reduced staff in the area in the last couple of months.*

Ms Collier indicated that it was not just the Carlisle area which was benefiting from increased trade but the rest of the County as well.

*A Member referred to a recent flight he had undertaken on American airlines where there had been a package of tourism information for US visitors placed on aircraft seats, although there had been nothing on Cumbria.*

Ms Collier was unaware of this marketing and thanked the Member for the information.

*A Member asked whether the North West Development Agency involvement in tourism would mean that there would be another tourist agency set up in Cumbria.*

Ms Collier considered that this would not be the case. Whilst North West Development Agency were putting money into tourism and therefore had a big say on tourism promotion, they seemed to be satisfied with the way in which the CTB was operating in an innovative way to promote Cumbria.

*With regard to the dedicated Officer helping areas recover from Foot and Mouth a Member asked about funding for this post.*

Ms Collier indicated that funding would expire in September 2003 although it was hoped to continue the Officer's employment through Rural Action Zone funding.

*A Member referred to Cumbria having the Green Globe Award.*

Ms Collier indicated that the aim of the Green Globe Award was to make tourism more environmentally sustainable. Cumbria was the only area to have this accreditation, which was available on a world wide basis. The Award had been made in 2000 and Cumbria had since been re-assessed and had obtained the Award for a second time. She considered that it was hard to measure the influence on tourism numbers from having this award.

The Chairman thanked Ms Collier for attending the meeting and for a most informative discussion.

Ms Collier thanked the Chairman and Members for the invitation which had given her an opportunity to discuss with Members the latest initiatives that the CTB were carrying out to promote tourism in Cumbria.

(The meeting ended at 12.10 pm)

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