

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Report of the Chairman

COUNCILLOR CAROLE RUTHERFORD

Since my last report there has been a further meeting of the panel and a number of workshops and site visits have either already taken place or are scheduled in the diary.

At the meeting on the 20th October the panel had asked for an update on the car parking situation. The panel had set up a task and finish group who had met and made several recommendations to the Executive last year. To date none of those recommendations had been progressed, largely because of the protracted discussions with the County around Parking Connect.. The panel were disappointed that there was to be a further delay whilst consultants conducted another review into parking in Carlisle.

On a more positive note the final report of the task and finish group on the Enterprise Centre should be available for the 1st December meeting. The Assistant Director responsible for Economic Development welcomed the timely input this would provide to the next phase of the transformation programme which would cover a review of the Enterprise Centre and the Tourist Information Centres in Carlisle. The Task and Finish Group has been able to have an in depth look at the Enterprise Centre which will provide valuable information to the review. Regards the Tourist Information Centre the panel had received a presentation some time ago on potential upgrades to the one in Carlisle centre. The one that had excited the panel most involved a substantial amount of money. Initially it was hoped that funding would be obtained externally but the bid failed. In view of the fact that capital monies allocated to other projects such as cleaning of the Viaduct site or work at the Sands were now on indefinite hold plus there were receipts from asset sales, the panel asked that the work on the Tourist Information Centre could be looked at again.

The Environment workshop held on the 10th October proved to be an interesting and useful preview to the agenda item on the 20th relating to next stages in the Environment transformation programme. The workshop had covered amongst other things the Lean Systems Thinking which was being used to help drive improvements and efficiencies in the department. As the aim is to have more efficient and proactive services thus reducing the number of complaints and reactive measures members should see a decline in the number of complaints they receive from their constituents.

The item on extending the Botchergate conservation area produced a lively debate. Conservation status can be a double edged sword. If development is carried out sympathetically it can enhance and improve the area. However, sometimes the extra requirements that have to be fulfilled can deter any work at all being undertaken.

Improving the economy of Carlisle has never been more urgent and the panel have ensured that it features high on its work load this year. A task and finish group was set up on the Enterprise Centre, the panel are closely following the progress of the City Centre Partnership BID (Business Improvement District) and a workshop on the economy is planned for 15th November. Following the meeting on the 20th the panel had an update on the progress of the BID from the consultant employed by the partnership. There was some concern over the slippage in the timetable that had occurred. The consultant had experience of guiding other parts of the country through the BID process and we were assured that the present timetable was feasible.

The Economy workshop on the 15th November will cover education, skills and training in the city and how they assist the economic development of Carlisle. Many reports have highlighted that Carlisle is a low wage low skilled economy and the fact that many school leavers leave education with few qualifications. Carlisle has seen a massive investment in school, college and university buildings the panel want to know is this achieving an increase in the qualifications, skill and aspirations of the citizens of Carlisle and an increase in economic investment and employment in the district.

Carole Rutherford Chairman

October 23rd 2011