
EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON 7 APRIL 2011

EEOSP.26/11 CARLISLE TOURISM PARTNERSHIP

The Director of the Carlisle Tourism Partnership (Ms Whitehead) presented report ED.16/11 that provided the Panel with a 6 monthly review of the Carlisle Tourism Partnership Action Plan.

Ms Whitehead reminded Members of the background to the Partnership and the reasons why the Partnership was set up. She stated that the challenge was to improve the appeal of Carlisle as a destination by raising the quality and diversity of the facilities available and communicating those improvements to markets that were more inclined to visit. Ms Whitehead advised that there was a major role to play in leadership and co-ordination in terms of tourism related activities and capital programmes and stated that although the partnership would be unable to deliver individual projects there was a need for leadership and an understanding of roles and responsibilities of key organisations.

Ms Whitehead gave a summary of the Partnership's key achievements since July 2009 and some events scheduled for the coming months and advised Members how those events would be marketed.

Ms Whitehead gave an update on the Tourist Information Centre and explained the immediate priorities and projects and also the achievements to date. Some of those achievements included:

- the successful completion of the training programme provided by Cumbria Tourism
- an increase by 5% of visitor numbers into Carlisle TIC over the last 2 years
- an increase in accommodation booking of 90%
- stocks of Carlisle Utd and Eddie Stobart souvenirs
- working with Carlisle college and Richard Rose Academy to provide work experience for students, attending open evenings and giving talks
- Carlisle TIC was now an agent for Superbreak Holidays
- the generation of £8,000 from Carlisle angling membership since becoming an agent for them.

Ms Whitehead advised members of the Marketing Collateral and the new website for Carlisle – discovercarlisle.co.uk. Ms Whitehead explained about partner marketing and PR and explained that Carlisle continued to receive excellent publicity and had hosted journals from local, regional, national and international locations. She advised that the Partnership were working on developing several clusters of food and drink operators and

were carrying out some filming around Carlisle's more contemporary food and drink outlets that would be used as a PR tool and to encourage travel writer visits.

Ms Whitehead advised Members about the Capital programme including the Roman Frontier Gallery at Tullie House, the Roman Gateway Public Realm Works and the Old Town Hall.

Ms Whitehead continued with an update on issues relating to improving the quality and profitability of Cumbria's business tourism market. She gave an update on activity in relation to the website, www.myplacecumbria.co.uk and the Cumbria Ambassador training programme.

Ms Whitehead further advised that the Partnership Development post would end on 31 March 2011 but that she would continue on secondment until the end of May to cover the One Big Weekend event. The Regional Growth Fund bid was submitted in January 2011 and was the only one of the Cumbria bids to receive LEP endorsement. A response was anticipated late March/early April. With regard to funding Ms Whitehead explained that the partnership had been able to secure additional funding from a variety of sources to deliver all of the activity included in the report. She gave an outline of the funding and added that the funding from the City Council was used to generate an additional £440,000 to support tourism and marketing of the City.

Ms Whitehead had worked with partners in marketing Carlisle as a Heritage City that targeted residents in North America and Canada who had a high level of disposable income but wanted to know that they were safe in the city.

Since the report had been produced the City Council had announced that Radio 1's One Big Sunday event would take place in May at Carlisle airfield. This was a major project that the Carlisle Tourism Partnership had been working on for several months. There had been concerns about the choice of site but after consideration Radio 1 representatives had agreed that the airfield was the only venue suitable. Letters had been sent to 5500 residents near to the airfield advising them of the event and the associated practical arrangements. The announcement had resulted in national publicity in newspapers and magazines. Ms Whitehead had been interviewed with representatives from Breakfast TV and Radio Cumbria.

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

- *The Panel thanked Ms Whitehead for all the work she had done.*
- *A current programme on TV focussed on a farm in Cumbria. There were several references to Cumbria and the programme gave a positive picture of the area. It was difficult to get conferences to come to Cumbria but people were interested in the rural areas and work had to be done to try to convince conference organisers to bring conferences to the area.*

Ms Whitehead advised that the Ambassador Leadership Group consisted of partners and looked to bring conferences relating to education, rural issues and nuclear issues to the area.

- *What was the cost to the City Council for the One Big Weekend event? And if there was a cost was it covered within the budget?*

Ms Whitehead explained that there were 10 main functions of the event and some would create income, some would have a cost and some would be a resource issue. She advised that Carlisle Tourism Partnership were trying to ensure that all costs would be covered. The biggest issue would be waste management and the County Council were negotiating with Cumbria Waste Services to manage costs. All parties and organisations were minimising costs for supply of services including the police, medical and waste management provision.

- *Carlisle United home games play host to 20,000 to 30,000 away fans each season and the Football Association was keen to make football matches family events. That should also be included in the Tourism strategy for the future of Carlisle.*

The Portfolio Holder advised that an event was to be organised involving Carlisle United and the trophy.

- *Were the costs for the One Big Weekend being met by marketing initiatives?*

Ms Whitehead advised that there would be advertisements on the City Council website and within the tourism guides. At the One Big Weekend event there would be only one commercial tent and the City Council had secured that. Information on English Heritage, University of Cumbria, Carlisle Tourism Partnership and Hadrians Wall Heritage Site would be available. The BBC had ensured that the Carlisle Tourist Information Centre would have the booking income from the event.

- *Carlisle railway station brings 1.7 million people into the city. How effectively does the Council use those gateways to advertise the City?*

Ms Whitehead explained that various methods of advertising had been tried at the railway station and that Officers were looking at reviewing the matter. Officers ensure a presence in the station when tourist trains are scheduled providing guided tours. Whilst it would be useful to have a Tourist Information satellite centre at the station it would not be cost effective. Ms Whitehead stated that Carlisle was highlighted in articles in the free magazines on Virgin trains.

- *Why does Carlisle station have no litter bins or left luggage facilities?*

Ms Whitehead explained that the lack of litter bins was due to security issues and that bike lockers had been provided.

The Assistant Director (Economic Development) (Mrs Meek) advised that the tourism service would be reviewed over the next 12 months looking at how to provide better services. The old town hall would be examined and a report presented to the Panel at a future meeting.

- *There were no cafes open in the city centre after 7:00pm. Had any of the local retailers made plans to remain open longer over the weekend of the One Big Weekend event?*

Ms Whitehead advised that she had been working with retailers and members of the nighttime economy group to put on after show parties that would be family based. There had been a number of offers and a free souvenir guide would be produced containing offers for local retailers.

Ms Whitehead confirmed that she had been working with members of the nighttime pastor scheme.

In response to a comment about the site of the Tourist Information Centre Mrs Meek advised that there were a number of issues to be examined and the options would be presented to Members.

- *Members had previously had sight of proposals for the Old Town Hall and agreed a way forward. Unfortunately funding had been lost but it was important that the Centre remained a high profile within the City Centre. Had Officers been investigating alternative funding?*

The Economic Development Portfolio Holder stated that Officers would continue to look at the Old Town Hall and while she was disappointed that the Council could not obtain heritage funding, funding had been applied for through the Regional Growth Fund and English Heritage.

The Strategic Director (Mr Crossley) advised that a report being presented to the Panel in June would include an update on the Old Town Hall.

The Economic Development Portfolio Holder stated her thanks to Ms Whitehead for all the work she had done during her post as Director of Carlisle Tourism Partnership and that she hoped the work would continue. Ms Whitehead confirmed that the Officers in the Tourism department were enthusiastic and would continue to work with partners and there was also a very good team based at the Tourist Information Centre.

RESOLVED – 1) The Panel thanked the Officer for the report on the Carlisle Tourism Partnership, which was positive and a pleasure to read.

2) The Panel were concerned about funding for the Old Town Hall initiative and urged the Executive to give its full support when looking at Capital Projects and funding allocations.

3.) The Panel were pleased that the work would not end when the Carlisle Tourism Partnership ended.

4.) The Panel understood that there was the possibility that the Tourism Partnership could be merged with the City Centre Partnership Group and that they looked forward to an update in June.