



ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Panel Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 29th November 2012

Title: Carlisle Tourist Information Centre

Report of: Carlisle TIC Task & Finish Group

Report reference: OS 33/12

Summary:

The final report of the Carlisle TIC Task and Finish group is attached. The report makes a number of recommendations for action for the Executive.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to

- Approve/amend the report and recommend it to the Executive, requesting a formal response.

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**Environment &
Economy Overview
and Scrutiny Panel**

Carlisle Tourist Information Centre



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Appendix 1 - Feedback from Members visits to Carlisle Tourist Information Centre

Members of the Task Group would like to thank all Officers involved in this review for their support. In particular Members would like to express their appreciation to the staff within Carlisle Tourist Information Centre

Recommendations

The Task Group make the following recommendations:

1. Immediate action should be taken to:
 - replacing the aging cash register in the TIC enabling better monitoring of retail stock.
 - lowering of part of the counter within the TIC to accommodate the needs of disabled visitors
 - provide new and improved signage outside the TIC
2. All means of modern technology should continue to be assessed to enable easy access to information and enhance the experience of visitors to both the TIC and the wider Carlisle city centre area.
3. Appropriate support be given to Officers in their task of sourcing a higher quality of merchandising available within the TIC especially focusing on local supplier arrangements such as Made in Cumbria.
4. Consideration be given to an alternative accommodation booking system in the light of the high cost of the Destination Management System(DMS) as currently operated by the TIC.
5. That an Options Paper be drawn up to examine the alternative ways forward for use of the Assembly Rooms within the Town hall and the use of the office area at the western end of the Old Town hall at second floor level.
6. That following the completion of this Report by this Task Group, a Working Group continues to sit within the Overview and Scrutiny framework to monitor the ongoing project development work to improve the Tourist Information Centre.

Initially during 2013 this Working Group should meet quarterly and report to the Economy & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel accordingly. In tandem with this a Project Development Plan be developed setting out short, medium and longer term improvement plans for the TIC facility as a gateway to the wider heritage of Carlisle as a whole.

Introduction

- 1.1 Carlisle Tourist Information Centre (TIC) is housed in the first floor of the Council owned Old Town Hall which is a prominent two storey Grade 1 Listed Building situated within the City Centre Conservation Area. The Ground floor is currently fully let on commercial leases to a range of retail businesses. The first floor also houses the Assembly Room which is hired out for meetings. TIC staff administer and manage the bookings for the Assembly Room.
- 1.2 In 2010 a substantial scheme was drawn up for the Old Town Hall to develop its role including a Conservation Management Plan setting a schedule of recommended repairs. The scheme also included a new entrance lobby at the ground floor and a new lift to serve a fully refurbished Tourist Information Centre. The overall cost of the scheme was estimated at £1.3M with the total funding package coming from the City Council, English Heritage, North West Development Agency and a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). However an HLF Funding Application was turned down and NWDA funding was subsequently not forthcoming.¹
- 1.3 Discussion with English Heritage continued and it was agreed that a more modest scheme of restoration and repair relating to the historic fabric of the building was to be progressed.
- 1.4 The Executive agreed a revised programme for the delivery of the project at their meeting on 3rd September 2012. The project would allow the fullest possible repairs and refurbishment to be completed allowing the Council to work from a firm base in looking at future options for maximising the use and commercialisation of the Old Town Hall building. This included a number of internal repairs and improvements such as improved services, lighting, plaster repairs, decoration and floor coverings in the TIC and Assembly Room.
- 1.5 The Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel took an early interest in the proposals in 2010 and supported the proposed works at that time. The Panel were clearly disappointed that funding for the scheme did not materialise but were still keen to see some refurbishment work undertaken on the building.
- 1.6 Once it was clear to Members that some repair and refurbishment works were to be progressed the Panel agreed that they would set up a Task and Finish Group to investigate the characteristics of a modern Tourist Information Centre and how this could be applied to Carlisle TIC. Members wanted to look at whether the Tourist Information Centre in Carlisle is fit for purpose and if not, to look at what type of services the Centre should be looking to provide
- 1.7 Cllrs Bainbridge (Lead Member), Bowditch, Frankin and Nedved 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 on 29th November 2012.
- 1.8 The Task Group held their initial meeting on 26th July 2012 and agreed that their Terms of Reference would be:

¹ ED 30/12 Old Town Hall – Approval Of Additional Capital To Ensure Delivery Of Preferred Repair And Improvement Programme. Report to Executive 3rd September 2012

- To gain an understanding of the services provided by and from Carlisle TIC
- To examine visitor feedback and talk to stakeholders to determine whether there are any gaps in the service
- To look at the various business models of TIC and how these could be applied to TIC without compromising the historical nature of the building or the TIC identity
- To examine the uses and demand of the Assembly Rooms and consider options to provision in the future
- To look at other examples of TIC in order to come to a view as to what Carlisle TIC should be aspiring to

1.9 This report details the Task Groups findings and makes a number of recommendations to the Executive of the Council.

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Methodology

2.1 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:

- Guidelines for Tourist Information Providers in England, Visit Britain
- ED 30/12 Old Town Hall – Approval of Additional Capital to Ensure Delivery of Preferred Repair and Improvement Programme. Report to Executive 3rd September 2012
- Visitor Statistics for Carlisle Tourist Information Centre 2003 to present date
- Assembly Room Hire statistics 2000 to present date
- Visit England Mystery Shopping Visit Report March 2012

2.2 Meetings of the Task Group were held on:

Date	Purpose	Present
26 th July 2012	To scope review and determine Terms of Reference	Task Group Members Director of Economic Development Economic Development Officer Tourist Information Officer Overview & Scrutiny Officer
15 th August 2012	Visit to Carlisle TIC - Cllr Franklin	
20 th August 2012	Visit to Carlisle TIC - Cllr Bainbridge	
29 th August 2102	Visit to Carlisle TIC - Cllr Nedved	
4 th September 2012	Feedback on visits to Carlisle TIC and preparation for visits to Skipton TIC and Leeds TIC	Task Group Members Economic Development Officer Tourist Information Officer Overview & Scrutiny Officer Committee Clerk
13 th September 2012	Visit to Carlisle TIC - Cllr Bowditch	
24 th September 2012	Task Group visit to Skipton TIC and Leeds TIC	Task Group Members Overview & Scrutiny Officer Committee Clerk
15 th November 2012	Task Group meeting with Portfolio Holder	Task Group Members Economic Development Officer Portfolio Holder

Findings

General Operational

- 2.3 Carlisle TIC is open to the public between 9:30am and 5pm Monday to Saturday from March to October and has a Sunday opening from May to August of 10:30am to 4pm. The opening hours are reduced November to February to 10am to 4pm (Mon-Sat only).
- 2.4 To coincide with the seasonality the TIC staffing levels also change throughout the year:
- 1 full time Tourism information Officer – works on counter
 - 1 senior Tourist Information Assistant, 36 hrs summer contract, 25hrs winter contract.
 - 1 part time Tourist Information Assistant, 21hrs summer contract, 18 hrs winter contract.
 - 2 part time Admin, 18.5 hrs summer contract, 15 hrs winter contract.
 - 2 seasonal staff (April – Oct) to cover Carlisle & Brampton, 28 hrs contact.
 - Bank staff x 2 during peak periods

Services offered

- 2.5 Members of the Task Group were informed that Carlisle TIC is one of 300 *Enjoy England Official Partners* which is coordinated by VisitBritain in partnership with the Regional Tourism Delivery Partners in England. Accreditation to the scheme is based on required minimum standards and the attraction of a certain level of visitors. Partners have access to mystery shoppers, free promotion leaflets, network access and free training courses for staff.
- 2.6 The TIC runs a comprehensive information service that is provided for Visitors, both domestic and international, as well as the local community. The centre also manages and promotes the adjoining Assembly Room, which hosts a variety of community activities such as fund raising coffee mornings, exhibitions, meetings and launches.
- 2.7 Services provided by the TIC include:
- Holiday Information Service, which is well used by many locals and visitors travelling within the UK.
 - A comprehensive local information service. It is a priority of the TIC to keep visitors fully informed about the area's attractions, facilities and tourism services. In doing so they will be encouraged to stay longer, see and visit more and increase spending.
 - Local and national accommodation bookings
 - Local and national travel information
 - Local business service – fax, photocopy and laminating service.
 - Agents for Theatre by the lake, Carlisle Angling, Green Room, Hadrian's Wall bus tickets
 - Deal with enquires relating to city events, for example, fireworks night, Christmas Events and Love Parks week
 - Provide unbiased knowledge about shops, restaurants and businesses within Carlisle and Cumbria.

- Promote and deal with enquires about walking along Hadrian's Wall and the other long distance walks which pass through Carlisle.
- Direct and signpost visitors and locals to other organisation's and businesses within the area.

2.8 The centre holds a variety of promotional literature including:

- Carlisle & Hadrian's Wall Visitor Guides + Places to Visit (holding stocks of 2500+ of each, at any one time)
- Brochures for other parts of Cumbria & the UK – stock a selection of between 50 & 100 brochures for other areas & cities and a selection of 200+ leaflets promoting local places of interest (in turn Carlisle expects to receive reciprocal arrangements from other TIC's around the UK)
- Bus & Rail times, both local & national
- Event Leaflets for Carlisle and Cumbria.

Seasonal Activity

2.9 The TIC provides a city centre base for all Christmas Events which happen within the city centre for example the Christmas Lights switch on and Santa parade. In the last year the centre took advantage of the city's major Christmas promotion's by staging and running the city centre's Christmas Grotto in the Assembly Room.

2.10 Task Group Members were informed that this was a major challenge to centre staff, who promoted and operated the Grotto but the Grotto gave the Tourist Information Centre the opportunity to raise its profile and attract locals and visitors, many who had not seen the facilities and services on offer.

Footfall

2.11 The footfall at the TIC has declined steadily over the past several years (see Figure 1 - Carlisle TIC Footfall 2003 - 2012) and it could be argued that many people use the internet to undertake their research prior to travel and have less need to use a TIC. In the UK, 76% of the population use the internet (source: IMRG April 2010). It is regarded as the main source of information for travel planning and the key medium at the booking stage but offline booking alternatives remain important.²

2.12 According to the England Tourism Framework dedicated TICs with a high footfall and/or a clear service will continue to play a key role in principle tourism destinations through professional staff who are skilled in customer care and have a wealth of product knowledge. However, in some cases, a TIC's inability to make recommendations and the poor location of some centres can create a barrier. Limited opening hours are also an issue in an era when consumers expect to be able to access information 24hours a day, 7 days a week.

² Modernising Visitor Information Action Plan 2010-2020 - England Tourism Framework

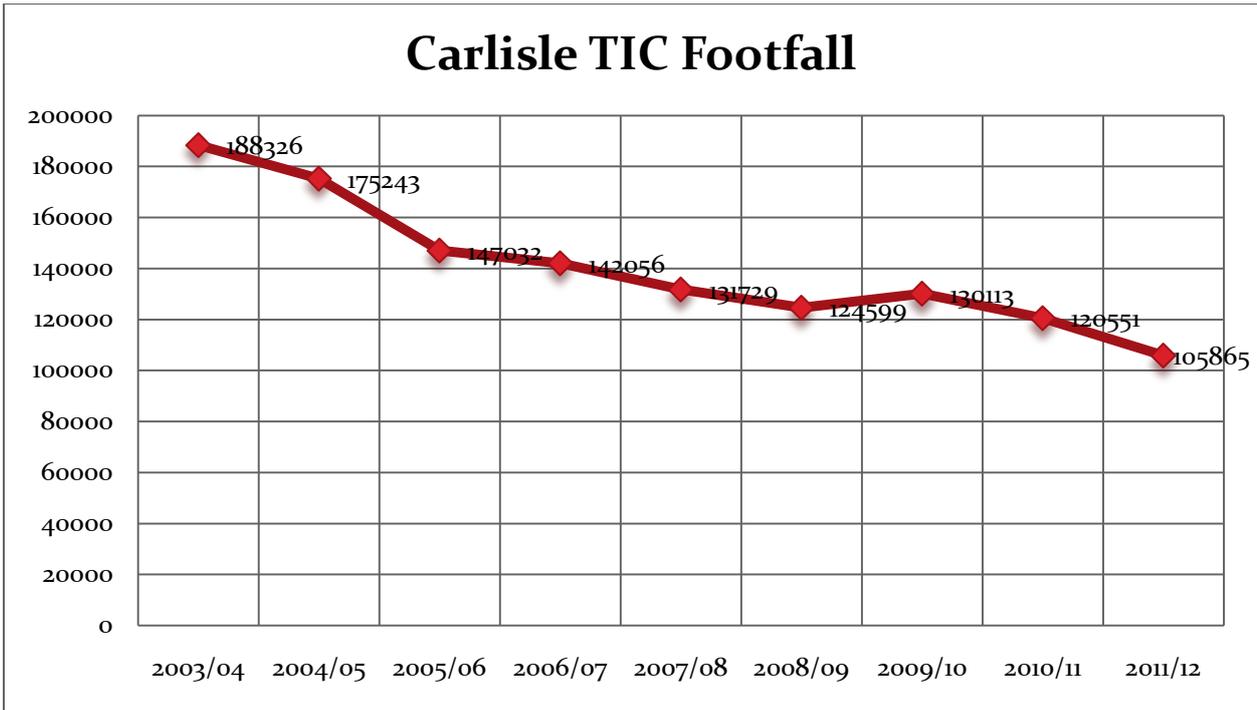


Figure 1 - Carlisle TIC Footfall 2003 - 2012

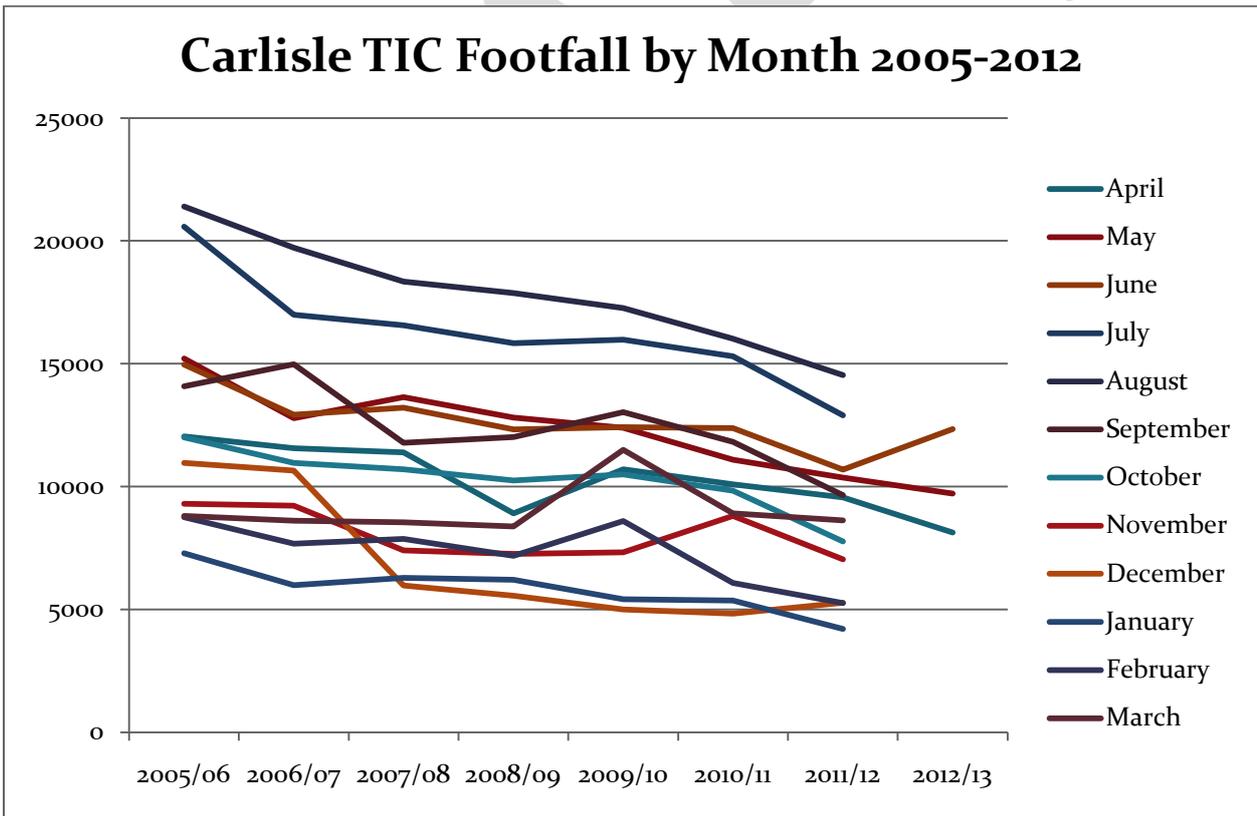


Figure 2 - Footfall by month 2005 - 2012

Income Streams

Accommodation booking

- 2.13 Task Group Members were informed that Carlisle TIC also provides a booking service for local and national accommodation. Bookings are completed through the Destination Management System (DMS) which has an annual fee of £3500. In line with Enjoy England Partnership requirements all accommodation promoted or booked is assessed under the VisitBritain or AA Quality schemes.
- 2.14 There has been a decline in accommodation bookings due to the break down of the Book a Bed Ahead (BABA), with less accommodation providers advertising with the TIC and an increase of people using the internet for research and bookings before their visit.
- 2.15 Due this decline the TIC had to look at other ways of generating income with providing the service. The service receives 10% from the accommodation provider and in 2010 a booking fee was introduced for all local bookings of £4.00. Many TIC's nationally have also incorporated an additional charge into their booking procedures.

Year (Jan-Dec)	Number of Bookings	Income Generated
2009	439	£3,413
2010	348	£4,270
2011	289	£3,652

- 2.16 The TIC is also a ticket agent for a variety of associations and with a small number of exceptions receives a commission of 5% for charitable organisations and 10% for commercial.

Assembly Room bookings

- 2.17 As detailed earlier in the report the TIC undertakes the booking administration for the adjoining Assembly Room. A discount of 50% for morning, afternoon or all day sessions, and a 37.5% discount for evenings is applied to registered charities, senior citizens and local community group's resident within the Carlisle area.
- 2.18 The statistics for the hire of the Assembly Room show that over time the demand for the facility has steadily decreased over time (Figure 3 - Hire of Assembly Room by Session (am, pm or evening) 2000 to 2012). The exception being the year 2005/06 due to a high number of bookings by the Flood Support Group following the floods in Carlisle in January 2005.
- 2.19 Members were informed that many groups found alternative accommodation during 2005/06 and have not brought their business back to the Assembly Rooms.
- 2.20 Members agreed that the room does not meet the requirements of those who want a modern meeting facility. There is also no on site parking. Members needed to give consideration to the possibility of a sub-let model for the Assembly Rooms with the room being used as a cafe/coffee shop. Task Group Members envisaged this much like the area within Waterstones bookshop.

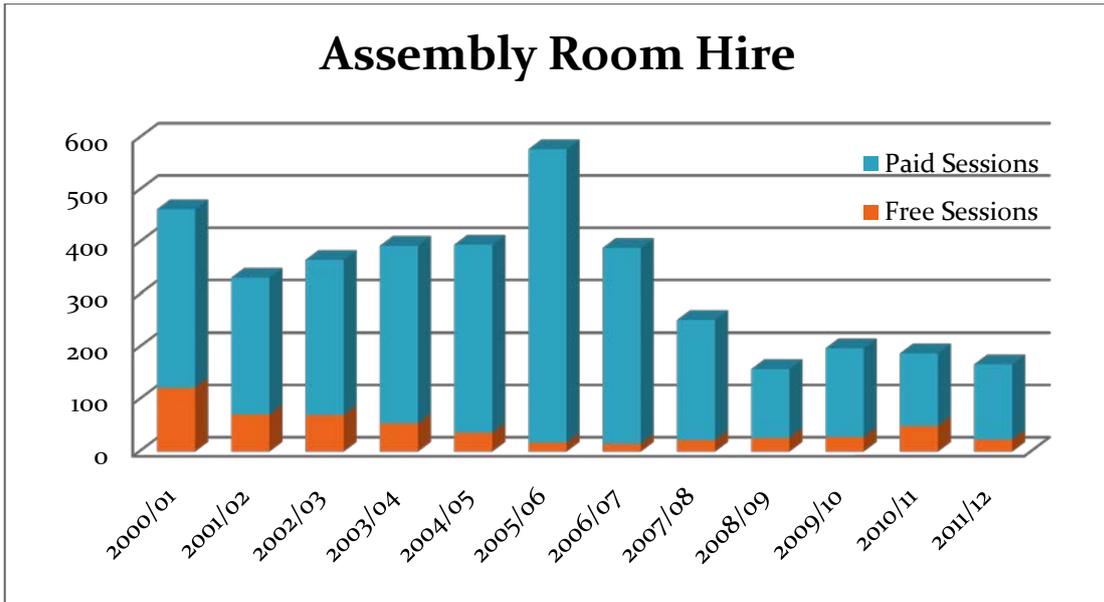


Figure 3 - Hire of Assembly Room by Session (am, pm or evening) 2000 to 2012

(Note: 2005/06 figure due to room being used during flood recovery period)

Merchandising / Commercial activity

- 2.21 The TIC also provides a wide variety of retail products and strives to buy locally made goods to sell in the centre and support the local industry where possible.
- 2.22 Minimal stock is kept over the winter period to keep stock levels low for the annual stock take on the 1st April. New season stock is purchased April – June and the Centre tries to hold sufficient stock for customer demand.
- 2.23 Although retail sales have decreased steadily over the past 5 years the profit margin has increased slightly leading to a smaller decrease in gross profit (see Figure 4 - Carlisle TIC Retail Sales 2007 - 2012). Members of the Task Group were informed that shoplifting is common in the TIC due to the retail layout.

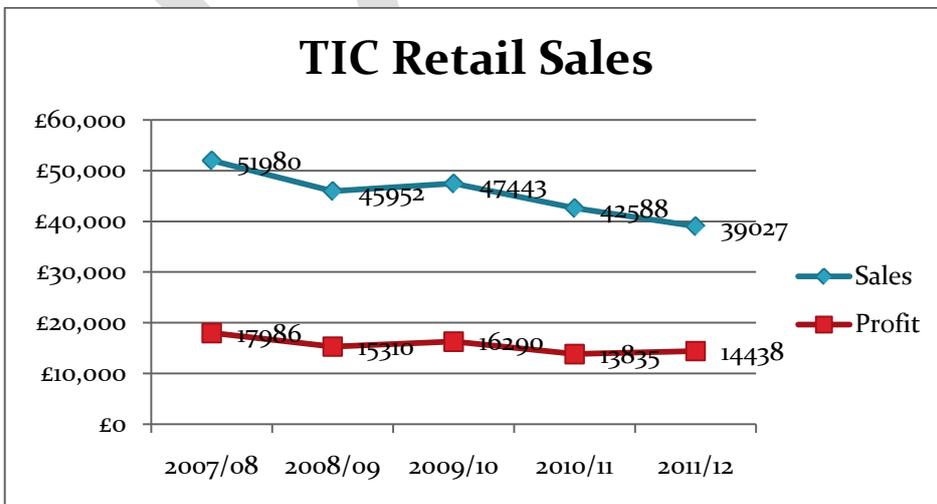


Figure 4 - Carlisle TIC Retail Sales 2007 - 2012

2.24 Members were informed that the TIC would like to stock *Made in Cumbria* products, particularly as apart from the seasonal fairs there are no retail outlets in Carlisle.³ However Members heard that the Chamber of Commerce are responsible for the allocation and provision of stock and were reluctant to use Carlisle TIC as a platform for these products.

Task Group Members “Work Experience”

2.25 Each Member of the Task Group spent some time in the TIC as part of this review having a general look around the building and shadowing staff in their role. This was also a good opportunity to speak to staff and get their views of how the TIC could be improved.

2.26 Each Member produced written feedback following their time in the Centre and this can be found at *Appendix 1*.

2.27 Essentially all Members reported back that they found the staff extremely knowledgeable, helpful and professional but they were working within an environment which was no longer fit for purpose.

2.28 Members found the interior of the TIC dark, dreary and dated and welcomed the Authority's commitment to improve the fabric of the building and refurbish the interior of the Centre. This is also a chance for the service to adapt and become more contemporary.

Visit to Skipton Tourist Information Centre and Leeds Tourist Information Centre

2.29 In order to make recommendations on the direction Carlisle TIC should be considering Task Group Members agreed that they should visit other TIC's. It was suggested by Officers that they visit Skipton and Leeds TIC. Skipton was suggested as the size was similar to Carlisle and they had recently moved premises and Leeds as this was a good example of how the TIC could be run in partnership with other organisations.

2.30 The Task Group visited both TIC's on 24th September 2012, travelling by train on the Settle line and walking to each of the centres from the respective Railway Stations.

2.31 Task Group Members were very impressed with **Skipton's Tourist Information Centre**, although it was not the easiest place to find. The retail offer was improved and that there was a clear definition between the information and retail.

2.32 The TIC had developed a link with well known local brands such as Yorkshire Tea, had sublet some display space to local sellers (in this case a photographer). The bulk of information was well placed and stacked vertically to make good use of space. The bulk of 'out of the area' literature was placed in books. From comments in the visitor book there was no sign of visitors not being happy with this situation.

2.33 The TIC has screen advertising which is becoming popular with tourism businesses. Advertising costs £25 + VAT for a four week promotion or an annual fee of £200 + VAT.

2.34 The fixtures were effective but also relatively cheap. The entire room was clean, crisp and well lit.

³ www.madeincumbria.co.uk – list of retail outlets

- 2.35 **Leeds Visitor Centre** was a much bigger and busier centre which can be accessed from the street or via the busy Railway Station. The Centre has second highest footfall in the UK with footfall up to 5000 people per day (Bath has the highest). The tourist information service provided by the Leeds Visitor Centre has been moved to a public-private sector delivery vehicle – Marketing Leeds (ML). Staff are seconded to ML but remain Leeds CC employees and continue to be on their payroll, the TIC budget has been transferred to ML.
- 2.36 The Leeds Visitor Centre attracts a high percentage (70%) of local footfall including many students. Due to their prime position they provide an extensive transport information service and receive substantial income from transport providers for this service.
- 2.37 Members noticed the wide range of retail offer at the Centre and were informed that retail sales accounts for 40% of the income.
- 2.38 The Centre had a good use of IT interaction, and had two kiosks where access to the internet could be purchased for £1 for 10 minutes (access to www.VisitLeeds.co.uk is free).
- 2.39 Both Skipton and Leeds had high service counters and staff at both centres said that this is one feature that they would like to change.

Conclusions

- 3.1 Task Group Members agree that Carlisle TIC is in need of modernisation in order to attract tourists, businesses and local people to use the centre. Footfall into the Centre has declined over time and Members believe refurbishment and adapting the service could reverse this decline and attract more footfall.
- 3.2 It is extremely important that visitors use a visitor information service as according to the England Tourism Framework well informed visitors will stay longer in destinations, potential move on to other English destinations and, most importantly, will want to return.⁴ Carlisle needs to consider how the service is provided both face to face contact and the use of technology to access visitor information.
- 3.3 Members of the Task Group have given a number of suggestions within their individual reports on ways that they believe the TIC could be improved and it is requested that these are given consideration during the design stage of the TIC. In particular Members wished to highlight the following which should be addressed immediately.

Recommendation: Immediate action should be taken to:

- **replacing the aging cash register in the TIC enabling better monitoring of retail stock.**
- **lowering of part of the counter within the TIC to accommodate the needs of disabled visitors**
- **provide new and improved signage outside the TIC**

- 3.4 Members are concerned that the income generated through accommodation bookings are only covering the cost of the annual fee to the Destination Management System (DMS) and would like to see consideration given to whether this is the most appropriate vehicle to for the bookings.

Recommendation: Consideration be given to an alternative accommodation booking system in the light of the high cost of the Destination Management System(DMS) as currently operated by the TIC.

- 3.5 A greater use of technology is required and Members suggest that consideration is given to points within the Centre whereby visitors can access the internet. A wi-fi service should also be considered so that visitors can use their own devices.

⁴ Modernising Visitor Information Action Plan 2010-2020 - England Tourism Framework

Recommendation: All means of modern technology should continue to be assessed to enable easy access to information and enhance the experience of visitors to both the TIC and the wider Carlisle city centre area.

- 3.6 The TIC should also have a clear plan of income generation and their retail offer needs to be reviewed. Members of the Task Group remain concerned with the reluctance of the Chamber of Commerce to provide Made in Cumbria stock for the TIC and urge that this pursued further to come to an agreeable solution.

Recommendation: Appropriate support be given to Officers in their task of sourcing a higher quality of merchandising available within the TIC especially focusing on local supplier arrangements such as Made in Cumbria

- 3.7 Consideration should also be given to the provision of on Screen Promotions in order to advertise local businesses and events and generate additional income.

Assembly Room

- 3.8 At the outset of the review Members of the Task Group were extremely mindful of the perceived under usage of the Assembly Room. It was agreed that part of their review would consider the use of the room past, present and future.
- 3.9 As stated earlier in the report each Member of the Task Group spend some time in the TIC and were also able to have a thorough look at the property. It was clear to all Members that the Assembly Room was no longer fit for purpose as a meeting room. Customers now require more modern presentation facilities and preferably on-site parking. The fabric of the room is tired and in the words of one Member is in need of some TLC.
- 3.10 The Task Group gave very serious consideration to the suggestion of partnering with a commercial company with regard to the Assembly Room. At the beginning of the review there was some reluctance by some Task Group Members to consider this option. However Members of the Task Group are now in agreement that this option is clearly the best way forward for the service. This will provide additional income for the Authority and increase the footfall into the Centre.

Recommendation: That an Options Paper be drawn up to examine the alternative ways forward for use of the Assembly Rooms within the Town hall and the use of the office area at the western end of the Old Town hall at second floor level.

Recommendation: That following the completion of this Report by this Task Group, a Working Group continues to sit within the Overview and Scrutiny framework to monitor the ongoing project development work to improve the Tourist Information Centre.

Initially during 2013 this Working Group should meet quarterly and report to the Economy & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel accordingly. In tandem with this a Project Development Plan be developed setting out short, medium and longer term improvement plans for the TIC facility as a gateway to the wider heritage of Carlisle as a whole.

Feedback from Members visits to Carlisle Tourist Information Centre

Cllr James Bainbridge – 20th August 2012

Overview:

The tourist Information centre has been sited in the traditional old town hall for a number of years. In an age where a number of TIC's around the UK have closed in places such as Durham and with TIC's such in Copeland under the threat of closure my view is that a functioning TIC whilst important to the showcasing of Carlisle needs to be revamped and updated so that it can improve its operation to become as close to breakeven as possible. The Assembly Rooms are increasingly outdated and underused to the point which I feel a commercial operation may enable the site to obtain a revenue stream which can help the TIC function.

The commitment to improve the fabric of the building is welcome, and once fixed the risk of internal damage is reduced; however this is also a chance for the service to adapt.

Observations from Visit to Carlisle:

- Staff knowledgeable and pleasant but the continuing state of the building is causing frustration.
- Extensive levels of information on local area and area outside of Carlisle (Is there too much non Carlisle information).
- Little interactivity and the only TV (showing local DVD's was out of order).
- Lack of easy disabled access and location on the first floor an issue.
- Steps are old and in poor weather the access is restricted to prevent accidents, which gives an impression of being closed.
- Frontage of the building is impressive but is it used to the best potential – (eg area under the stairs shut and used as storage for Alternative).
- Lighting unliked by staff and not effective on darker days
- Carpet shot to bits and prevents better use of display units as it covers holes.
- Counter felt by staff to be too high for disabled use.
- Display boards starting to look their age and hides the old civic furniture.
- IT system dated and unreliable – needs replacing.
- Book ahead facility hidden away and doesn't cover costs, moving to the front counter would help but is this a service which has a long term future. Could be better supported by local businesses.
- Lots of stuff dating back years in the filing cabinets – is it too much and is a paper cull needed.
- Uniforms – Staff in T-shirts (Discover Carlisle), would a proper uniform be better.
- Lots and lots of leaflets everywhere – could there be better definition between retail and information.

- Assembly Rooms – Completely underused with a old kitchen space. Conference facilities thought about but would that bring in much new business given parking and the cost of equipment.
- Assembly Rooms – a food and beverage retailer was at one point interested in taking the upstairs space. Is this still the case?
- The rooms need lightening up to make the most of the limited sunlight, but kept to a palate suitable to the age of the building. Similarly the display units could be lightened to assist this.
- Counter to be adapted/ replaced to have better access.
- The old furniture could be a better focus of interest.
- Retail sales were slightly dated. Lots of low cost items some of which were standard fare.
- Potential with a fresh start to be a much improved space to help the service.

Personal thoughts on ways to improve the service:-

1. Look to build a consensus on finding a commercial partner to operate out of the Assembly Rooms which could provide a footfall to the TIC as well as an income.
2. Look to reform the way information is displayed.
 - 2.1. More interaction such as Internet Access (which could bring in an income)
 - 2.2. Use of in house TV advertising of events and businesses.
 - 2.3. Less leaflet displays no non local information
 - 2.4. Improved display equipment so information is stored in one place from top to bottom.
3. Improved security to reduce stock loss, such as dummy cameras and better sight lines in the retail area.
4. More use of up and coming brands such as Eddie Stobart and Herdy to add local retailer content to the TIC. Disappointed that Made in Cumbria seem to have little interest, but could rack space be sold on three month lets.
5. Carpets and lighting will need a radical replacement
6. Redecorate the inside to increase light.
7. Adapt the counter to create a lower area.
8. Replace or repaint existing units to lighten the inside.
9. Move the book ahead facility to the front counter to create a space which could act as web point.
10. Cull the information held on site.
11. Better uniform for staff.
12. Look at refreshing the steps and frontage of the staircase to better showcase the building. Can the steps be coated/roughed up to help access?
13. Perhaps putting a small marker outside to show that the Market Cross marks the end of the Cumbrian Way.
14. Could there be space found at the train station to help distribute information to tourists arriving on the steam trains. (eg the old Hertz office).

Following a visit to the Carlisle Tourist Information Centre, I have compiled a short report on my observations. When entering the TIC it is well laid out, the staff at the desk very welcoming and knowledgeable.

There were some problems with the building which i will list:

- A very steep stairwell which the staff use. It is not easy to navigate the stairs if carrying items such as stock. As a result stock is stored elsewhere and there is lack of good storage space.
- The information desk is high. A wheelchair user could find it difficult to easily communicate with staff, in my opinion a lower desk situated in the centre would be beneficial.
- The space where the administrator is situated seems unfit for purpose. It is a very small space and also an access route to the stairs. It appears to be an awkward space to work from. The staff member reported that is a very warm place in the summer and very cold in the winter.
- The general appearance of the centre is shabby. The centre is in need of refurbishment. It requires decorating, replacement of old floor covering. It is in need of, as one member of staff put it “some tender loving care”.
- The area where the staff take their breaks is very run down. It was reported that water leaks in through the roof window when it rains. We are all aware of how much rain we get in Carlisle. This area is in real need of refurbishment.
- There is no wii fii facility, it may be beneficial for customers to be able to use the internet whilst in the centre. The library is of course nearby, people can be directed there.

What I observed was a staff who really enjoyed working in the centre, who generally liked the building and where the TIC is situated, that is in the centre of town. The outlook from the building is very nice, looking out to the precinct from the elevated position is pleasant. Unfortunately I was unable to see the Assembly room on this visit as it was in use. I am aware this part of the building also needs to be refurbished, and the function evaluated as part of the Task and Finish remit.

As an aside, I recently visited Belfast. I made a point of going to the TIC. It was a very large open centre, looked more modern than our TIC. As the staff were very busy I did not get the opportunity to speak to any of them about the centre, I used it as a customer. It is difficult to make comparisons, it looks very different than our TIC but that does not make it any better. I look forward to visiting a TIC with the group in the near future in order to make comparisons and discuss.

Cllr Paul Nedved – 29th August 2012

Can I in the first instance thank Laura and the TIC staff for their time and welcome given during my visit to Carlisle TIC

The visit was comprehensive and exhaustive allowing me to view the entirety of TIC and Assembly Room and the myriad of small rooms "behind the scenes"

My initial impression is of a primary historical building at the heart of the City which is a "jewel in the crown " however whose interior is both outmoded and outdated for 21st C tourism needs. Clearly the TIC is strategically in an excellent place and has great potential. However the current retail/tourism fixtures/fittings severely obscures it's historical interior whilst not maximising its potential as a tourism hub, retail space and an information point for local residents.

Similarly the assembly room is suffering from lack of refurbishment , competition from alternative meeting/conference space and accessibility. Clearly there is considerable scope if it underwent a modest re-decoration and repair , improved furniture and restoration back to its historical backdrop.

My key observations and recommendations for the TIC would be :

- Clear need for redecoration, modern lighting, carpets , new information counter which would serve to enhance the visitor experience.
- Radical overhaul of the retail /tourism space exposing the historical features whilst exploiting both the retail and tourism take and throughput. Emphasis must be to increase visitor/resident experience and footfall.
- Broaden the retail experience through local suppliers (Made in Cumbria) , increased partnerships with Tullie House , Cathedral and English Heritage. Maximise local memorabilia and literature.
- Improved visual/audio interpretative displays. Also improved access to computer terminals and Wi-Fi. Interactive displays.
- Whilst there is a substantial booking facility for rooms, events and activities which is commission based there is scope for working with other heritage sites and Carlisle Leisure to add to income.
- Rethink over access with difficult/steep steps which may act as a deterrent. Need to look at both disabled and customer access.
- Freestanding information board outside TIC relaying services provided, local information and "What's On" Guide
- Improved signage at strategic points in City Centre to clearly direct visitors to TIC and other heritage sites through the City. MAXIMISE TOURIST POTENTIAL. Satellite tourist points at Station, Bus Station , Sands Centre, Tullie House.
- Feasibility study whether we capitalise on back office accommodation.
- Tourist material outside TIC in hotels, B& B's Station etc does not reflect City tourism sites and event guides. Majority relate to tourism locations in Lakeland and Hadrian's Wall.

With regard to the Assembly Room:

- Urgent requirement for repairs/re-decoration and improved facilities and furniture if intended to continue as a meeting room.
- The usage and income has declined markedly which is a reflection of the shabby appearance accessibility and alternative venues in the City. Also scope for improved marketing of the facility.
- A priority should be to test the commercial viability of letting the space for retail /cafe /gallery exhibition space to a private concern. This would provide additional rental income and free the

Council from the cost of refurbishment and internal maintenance. Would also add to the footfall through the TIC.

Overall a TIC Management Committee reporting to the Director of Economic Development which would include Councillors and other parties should be developed. Maybe have a wider Tourism Strategic brief.

DRAFT

Cllr Steve Bowditch - 6th September 2012

I visited the Carlisle TIC on Thursday 6th September. I would like to thank Laura and her staff for their kindness and professional manner during my visit.

The state of the building and its poor interior and old equipment will have been recorded by the other members of the Task and finish Group. To ensure that the building does not deteriorate to this condition again I suggest that:

1. That there is a Management Committee for the Carlisle TIC to include Councillors and report directly to a Scrutiny Committee yearly this will be in Council Minutes but the committee should meet on a more regular basis.
2. That this Management committee will include a regular TIC Managers report and include updated Maintenance schedule
3. A five year internal and external Maintenance schedule be drawn up, costed and implemented.
4. This Committee needs its own budget and to be responsible for Income and Expenditure.
5. The establishment of such a Committee would allow the ideas of the TIC to be listened to and where accepted implemented. They really do know how a modern TIC should operate and be run.

It maybe that different structure is found to manage the TIC but a structure needs to be found to ensure that its current problems do not arise again. These problems are:

1. The building does not appear to have decorated for fifteen years. It urgently needs to be:
 - decorated .
 - have new carpets.
 - needs new modern lighting that conforms to statutory guidance on workplace lighting.
 - Needs new lower counter that allows wheelchair users to access the ICT.
 - It urgently needs new Computer Terminals with Wi-Fi.
 - Needs urgently new computer register. The current one is not reliable and spares are not readily available
 - Outside steps need weeding and sweeping daily and the railings need to be repainted.
2. The main room needs to be restored to allow for its historical nature to be revealed. The Manager said that she receives regular questions from the public about the room. As one of the most historic interiors in the City it should be shown. The shelving on the left hand wall opposite the main desk should come down to show the Old Council Chamber layout.
3. There is great scope for retail development. The idea of Made in Cumbria goods only should be explored. A more modern interior would encourage customers to stay and explore.
4. A decision needs to be made on the Community Room. Two central ideas:

- (i) Develop it properly as a Community Resource and modernise it. To include TIC facilities, white boards; New Kitchen and toilets. New larger lift if at all possible.
- (ii) Allow it to be commercialised. The most obvious way is to offer it to a food and beverage retailer. A commercial readability study for this should be undertaken before this route is taken.

My personal preference would be for number 1. Develop it as a Community Room. This though would be the most expensive option.

A further commercial opportunity which I strongly recommend is that the office on the far left of the building be decorated, modernised and let out for office space. This office has its own ground floor access and its own Toilet.

The wonderful sign that is in the Managers office about S Outland and England be hung up outside.

The main aim should be to get some pride back into the TIC by getting it to shine both inside and out.

DRAFT