

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 22

meeting date: 7 SEPTEMBER 2010
title: CLITHEROE CASTLE MUSEUM – FIRST TWELVE MONTHS OF OPERATION
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1. PURPOSE

1.1 To provide members with an update report about Clitheroe Castle Museum's first year in operation.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Council Ambitions – This report contributes to making sure that the council provides efficient services, to protect and enhance the existing environmental quality of our area and improving access for all.
- Community Objectives – This report relates to the following priorities outlined in the community strategy: encouraging access for all, community cohesion, culture and tourism.
- Corporate Priorities – To provide services for people where they live, improve access to services, promote the exceptional environment of area and lifestyle.
- Other Considerations – None

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Clitheroe Castle Museum re-opened to the public on 23 May 2009 following its £3.5million refurbishment scheme to transform it into a high profile heritage attraction for Lancashire.

2.2 The site is now run by Lancashire County Council's Museum Service on behalf of Ribble Valley Borough Council.

2.3 Pre-development visitor numbers to the museum from 1 April 2006 – 31 March 2007 were 8,063.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

3.1 The original visitor projections to the museum in its first financial year of opening (2009/10) was 16,000. This was exceeded, and not including estimated visits to the café, Stewards Gallery, Creative Activity Area or events the total entries was closer to 22,000.

3.2 In financial terms therefore, the estimated admissions to the museum of £22,000 were surpassed reaching just over £37,000 by the end of March 2010.

- 3.3 In October 2009, the museum received a very positive report from Visit Britain's Visitor Attraction Quality Awareness Scheme (VAQAS) following its application and inspection and was later awarded the accreditation of 'Quality Assured Visitor Attraction'.
- 3.4 Over the course of the year the museum has been put forward for a number of awards by key stakeholders involved in the development and running of the site and has been:
- Named Winner of the Community Project of the Year Award, a nomination submitted by Turner and Townsend, Project Managers for the Castle Heritage Scheme.
 - Shortlisted for a national Groundwork award and a Landscape Architects Award, submitted by Groundwork Pennine Lancashire – yet to be announced.
 - Named Winner of the Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board's Small Visitor Attraction of the Year Award 2010 – Submitted by RVBC and LCC
 - As a result of the LBTB Awards the Museum goes through to the North West Regional Awards, of which the winners will be announced at the end of September. If it is successful in that it will then go on to the National Tourism Awards.
- 3.5 Many of these awards have been down to the substantial and innovative improvements that have been made to the site which include some of the following:
- Improved interpretation to make more family friendly (one of our key target audiences) with innovative interactive and family backpacks.
 - Improved branding, signage and orientation.
 - New free-of-charge Steward's Gallery providing changing and inspirational exhibitions.
 - Café facilities and retail area.
 - New disabled facilities
 - Clitheroe Castle site leaflet and internal museum orientation leaflet to assist navigation around the site and galleries.
 - Guidebook produced for visitors wanting to learn that little bit more about exhibitions.
 - Site marketing plan.
 - External creative activity area.
- 3.6 An events programme was developed over the course of the year, highlights include the Medieval Market (August 2009) and Medieval re-enactment weekend (August 2010) also the Steward's Gallery has attracted repeat visitors through its regularly changing exhibition programme, which has been supported by RVBC Arts Development Department.
- 3.7 The Atrium Café has also become a regular venue for the Ribble Valley Jazz events and has been used by a number of community groups and organisations as the base for their meetings and events.
- 3.8 The museum has also engaged with organisations such as the Clitheroe Chamber of Trade and Commerce and the Ribble Valley Tourism Association to give support initiatives and promote the site further in the community.
- 3.9 The museum has also engaged further with the community and local schools. For example, pupils from Ribblesdale School were asked to design several Timeline Plaques to represent key milestones in the local area's history. The design involved a Braille description for visually impaired visitors and an

innovative design allowing for creative play and learning across a broad spectrum of age groups. Located in the Creative Activity Area.

3.10 Museum staff members have undergone Welcome Host Training and have been encouraged to develop their skills and knowledge in specialist areas relating to the museum exhibits to ensure that good customer service is maintained.

4. ISSUES

Lancashire County Council is currently going through a complete staffing restructure and therefore it has still yet to be made clear how this might affect the museum – in terms of their educational development, overall management and marketing and communications support.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – Depending on the County's current restructure, the Museum staff may require further support from RVBC officers.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – None
- Political – Future joint partnership working with Lancashire County Council.
- Reputation – Positive involvement of the council in a high profile visitor attraction. Ensuring that the museum and café operate a quality service for residents and visitors on the council's behalf.

6 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE:

Notes the contents of the report.



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For further information, please contact Rebecca Webster 01200 414496