

REPORT OF CAREW CASTLE MANAGER

SUBJECT: CAREW CASTLE HOLDINGS

This report reviews recent progress at Carew from an operational perspective.

OPERATIONS

The operational emphasis in recent years has been on commercial performance. This can be measured in several ways.

A. Visitor Numbers

It is extremely pleasing to report that despite the economic downturn that our visitor numbers have held up very well (36,500 visitors in 2011 as opposed to 37,000 visitors in 2010 and 37,400 in 2009).

We continue to monitor visitors to understand how much they enjoyed and understood from the visit and so it was extremely pleasing this year that 90% of visitors advised that they knew more about the history of the National Park following their visit and that 99% consider that the visit to the castle was value for money

B. Education

This has proved to be a real success story with c300 more school children attending in 2011 than in the previous year. (92 schools in 2011, 91 in 2010 and 78 in 2009).

The majority of schools come from Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion or Carmarthenshire, although there are a few travelling much further (e.g. Kent, Bristol) who visit Carew as part of their school holiday in Pembrokeshire.

It was enormously satisfying and a great pleasure to be able to receive a Sandford Award for Education, the highest standard of Heritage Education in the UK. Once again this was due to the efforts made by of all the staff and was especially pleasing as it was achieved at a time of major cost cutting.

C. Income

Again it is extremely pleasing to report that income has gone up 2% from £181,000 to £18,620 (Admissions income accounting for 1½% and retail income for ½%). Again this is in a climate of downturn within the tourism market as well as a downturn in the general economy. Particular relevance in this category is the spend per head which has also increased from £1.87 to £1.90.

D. Expenditure

This has been the main focus of the team's attentions. Targets had been set to achieve savings of c. 19% over the last year and in fact this was exceeded with over £36,000 of net operating costs being saved in comparison to the previous year through some really severe cost cutting :-

Staffing c.£6,000
Premises/Site Materials, Utilities etc c. £5,000
Vehicle/Travelling Costs c.£1000
Uniform, Stationery, Livestock, Events, Advertising c.£3,000
Merchandise Purchasing c.£1,000
Support Services, Pension costs c.£12,000

This was then bolstered by our increased income of c.£7,000 to create the 'saving' of £36,000

All this being achieved by a major staff effort with every individual member making contribution and driving down costs.

E. Staffing

The team at Carew remains small with a Centre Manager and a part time administrative support post keeping the site operational throughout the year and then supplemented by six seasonal Discovery Guides and the flexible band of educational contributors who are called upon to supplement the schools programme. This is an extremely small compliment of staff with the same part time staff returning year after year showing a real commitment to the site and bringing considerable expertise and experience of dealing with a whole range of issues which the site generates.

F. Community

The Castle team pride itself with its relationships with the local community. The recent annual Stakeholder Group involving representatives of the community as well as the owners and their agents is a good opportunity to explain something of the season and looking forward to future events and is extremely pleasing to get praise and support as part of our ongoing relationship.

The staff at the castle are currently working with the local community to organise a special event to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee which will involve a 4 day medley of fun with 3 events on each day.

Of particular interest this year has been the increase in the involvement of the local Youth Club with activities held at the castle throughout 2011. This year they have made several visits involving ghost tours, mill visits, games, sports and workshops and we hope very much to continue this partnership arrangement throughout 2012 and beyond.

G. Maintenance

There have been two major concerns this year:

- i. **Falling masonry**
There has been a history of occasional masonry falls over many years. These have been isolated and emergency repairs have been undertaken in each case in addition to immediate short term health and safety measures to exclude the public from the affected areas. There would now however appear to be a pattern of masonry failures and this is currently the subject of a full health and safety and structural examination involving key partners (including Cadw, our Health and Safety Advisor, Building Projects Officer, Building Conservation Officer, Archaeological Advisor etc.) with a view to quickly developing a strategic approach to identifying and resolving any outstanding issues. This coincides with the completion of the latest phase of Cadw assisted consolidation work (total costs are c£24,000 over the last three years) and so a review of future maintenance is timely.

- ii. **The Causeway**
This is a vulnerable structure in a particularly 'aggressive' environment and we continue to undertake ongoing inspections both in-house and using specialist experts. This year a series of works were identified in relation to the core of the wall and this work was immediately undertaken in order to consolidate voids in the body of the causeway as well as leaching through the sluice gates and sill. The majority of this work has been completed but further minor works will be undertaken before the main summer season starts. (Total costs are c£89,000 over the last three years).

Both of these issues are the subject of ongoing monitoring and review.

Conclusion

Once again it has been a very busy year at the castle with a whole range of issues to contend with. The particular highlight was achieving the Sandford Award, stabilising income and visitor numbers, and all in a context of major financial savings and a depressed economy.

I hope Members will join in thanking all the staff for their ongoing commitment and effort.

TH
14 March 2012