

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE – 23 OCTOBER 2001

AYRSHIRE & ARRAN TOURIST BOARD

Report by Director of Development Services

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** To inform the Committee of developments regarding Ayrshire & Arran Tourist Board (AATB) since October 2000 and to recommend strategic principles for future tourism information services and promotion strategy.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1** On 24 October 2000, the Committee received a report which discussed proposals for changes to the structure of the Board of AATB and a summary of the conclusions of AATB's strategy for tourist information.
- 2.2** The Committee's decisions included agreement:
- to approve the restructuring of the representation on AATB;
 - to note the changes proposed to the provision of tourist information.
- 2.3** The restructuring of representation on AATB was implemented at the Board's last AGM. Since then, the Board's activities have included:-
- induction sessions for new Board members
 - a survey of the effects of foot and mouth disease on tourism businesses
 - a campaign in a number of newspapers under the headings "It must be Ayrshire" and "It must be Ayrshire & Arran" to promote the area in response to damage to tourism caused by foot and mouth disease. This included a joint newspaper advertising campaign with Ryanair during June 2001.
 - a drive to increase the number of tourism businesses which are members of AATB
 - preparation of a tourism strategy for Ayrshire & Arran which emphasises features identified as "icons" – Burns, golf and Culzean Castle. It also seeks to emphasise business tourism.
 - establishment of a Golf Sub-Committee to manage the Golf Niche Marketing project; recruitment of a Golf Tourism Manager (financed by Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire for 2 years); and production of a golf guide

- recruitment of a Business Tourism Manager financed by Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire and work to create a conference and business section
- preparation for next year through booking space at the Scottish Travel Fair 2002 and work on the next Ayrshire & Arran Accommodation Guide
- the establishment of a call-centre for accommodation booking

3 LOCAL TOURIST INFORMATION SERVICES

- 3.1** Tourist Information Centres have been a core feature of the services provided by AATB and its predecessors for many years. These were originally developed as accommodation bureaux, and based their income on charging commissions. In order to supplement this income they developed other services such as souvenir and gift sales and travel booking. Many of these services came to be used by local residents as much as by tourists. Five years ago a computerised accommodation system was introduced on a national basis.
- 3.2** It has never been easy to raise sufficient revenues through tourist information offices to meet their costs. They have become an increasingly disproportionate drain on AATB's finances. The services provided have also been outdated. The rapid expansion of accommodation booking by Internet and e-mail has made AATB's previous computerised accommodation service look archaic. Other services have not kept fully up to pace with changes in the pattern of tourism, changes in travel systems, and changes in tourist expectations of local information services, although in some areas such as Arran where the tourism product has changed less the information centres continue to perform a valuable function.
- 3.3** TICs have also lost their status in national strategy. The local tourist information centre network accommodation services were conceived as part of a programme to assist visitors to travel around Scotland by booking accommodation from one area to the next. This has been outdated by the Internet, booking by phone (including mobile phones), hotel chains and dramatic changes in the focus of tourist interest in Scotland. As a result accommodation booking services delivered by local information centres, and the local information outlets themselves are no longer viewed as core components of national tourism programmes.
- 3.4** This national debate has distracted attention, however, from the continuing role of local tourist information outlets in assisting visitors to find their way around the area they are visiting. This continues to be important, not only to assist visitors in making their stay enjoyable, but also to draw visitors to local facilities. In order to present a vibrant tourist product it is essential that visitors are "connected up" to local visitor facilities and to retailing and catering businesses.
- 3.5** AATB has recognised the need to change radically the information services provided. To date it has:
- introduced a new call centre with accommodation booking facility, based at

their offices in Prestwick

- developed web pages linked to Visit-Scotland's web pages which provide information on accommodation and e-mail booking arrangements.

At the same time, however, the network of TICs has been reduced and visiting hours have been curtailed. Of most relevance to East Ayrshire is the closure of the Kilmarnock TIC.

3.6 AATB has not yet developed a fully articulated vision for replacement local information services. This was expected when the Kilmarnock TIC was closed. The need for the development of a new style of information outlets must be viewed as a priority.

3.7 Some limited progress has been made in developing such alternatives:

- leaflet racks have been placed in some new locations including Dean Castle Visitor Centre, the Dick Institute and Kilmarnock Bus Station
- AATB's web site has been linked to the Council's Intranet and can, therefore, be accessed from local offices (discussions on appropriate tourist information signing for local offices are ongoing)
- AATB is committed to introducing electronic facilities at some of these information outlets, but this will require funding.

3.8 This falls well short of an adequate format which should include features such as:

- electronic terminals (preferably with a printout capability)
- linked assistance to local accommodation business to subscribe to electronic booking systems
- information on buses and other public transport (this might be provided through a link with SPT)
- well maintained leaflet racks, involving a systematic over-view of coverage
- the development of a range of appropriate leaflets
- local information "libraries"
- staff at the relevant locations trained to assist visitors in accessing information available

Locations for such facilities could include Council local offices, libraries, hotel lobbies, and visitor facilities.

3.9 AATB is collaborating with Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire and the three Councils on developing a new system for tourist information in the local area based on an IT approach. A pilot scheme will commence shortly with a view to a subsequent European funding application. The pilot scheme will include one experimental terminal in each Council area plus one at Hahn Airport, Frankfurt. There will be

liaison with Community Services regarding possible locations for the terminal in East Ayrshire. The AATB should be asked to ensure that this pilot scheme is developed into a new network of local tourism information outlets.

4 LOCAL TOURIST STRATEGY

4.1 As mentioned in para 2.3, AATB has developed a strategy for Ayrshire and Arran which focuses on the “icons” of Burns, golf and Culzean Castle, along with business tourism (ie, conferences, exhibitions, seminars, etc).

4.2 In terms of the economic benefits which might accrue to East Ayrshire residents from such a strategy, there are a number of reservations:

- Burns – there are sites and collections in East Ayrshire linked to Burns, but there is a real concern that sites in East Ayrshire will not be built into core promotional programmes
- Golf – the Community Services Department is in liaison with AATB’s golf sub-group, but it is necessary to acknowledge that the internationally famous golf courses will be prioritised, and that these are not in East Ayrshire.
- Culzean Castle – in 2000 Dean Castle and Country Park combined attracted more visitors than Culzean Castle and Country Park combined (although this not a completely like-with-like comparison since the Dean has free access whereas Culzean imposes a charge). (Source: Visitor Attraction Monitor 2000).
- Business Tourism – there are venues within East Ayrshire but it is necessary to acknowledge that the larger venues with easy car parking are outwith this area.

4.3 For East Ayrshire, an approach based on the variety of tourist opportunities in the local area which appeal to niche markets or themes is likely to be more beneficial, e.g.

- Historic Sites (Dean Castle & Country Park, Loudoun Hill, Loudoun Kirk, Loch Doon Castle, Barr Castle, Sorn Castle, etc.)
- Cultural Heritage (sites associated with Burns, Dean Castle, Dick Institute, Sorn Castle, etc.)
- Industrial & Railway Heritage, (Baird Institute, Dunaskin, Scottish Industrial Railway Centre)
- Activities (walking, cycling, golf, fishing, etc.)
- Genealogy/Family History Research (Baird and Dick Institutes)
- Contemporary Arts and Culture (Dick Institute, Cathcartston, Book Town)
- Factory shops
- Accessible environment with interpretation (Loch Doon, Dean Castle Country

Park, Irvine Valley once its paths project with interpretation is complete, etc.)

- Children's interests and amusements (Dean Castle Country Park, Loudoun Castle, etc.)

Promotion of sites and facilities in East Ayrshire within such a context would require an approach which is integrated with the provision of information about the area set out at para. 3.7.

5 NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

5.1 It is expected that VisitScotland, at the request of the Scottish Executive, will shortly be circulating a consultation paper on the future of the ATB network. It is understood that this will be set in the context of a new strategic framework for national tourism promotion, and that it will contain far-reaching proposals for ATBs, re-focusing their functions and changing their constitutions and relationship with national and local organisations and the industry. The proposals are likely to have major consequences for the TIC operations of ATBs.

5.2 A further report will be brought to the committee once details of the proposals are known. But it is suggested that the following principles should be adopted by the Council in responding to consultations:

- The wide ranging role of local authorities in providing business support and visitor services must be recognised
- the continued provision of local visitor information outlets provided along the lines outlined at para.3.7 above must feature as a core component in any new arrangements
- national promotional strategy must feature the variety of established attractions offered by areas such as Ayrshire, as outlined at para.4.3 above.

Local authorities will be particularly concerned to ensure that the contributions which they currently make to the ATBs continue to be used to support local information services and locally appropriate promotion strategies.

6. LEGAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no legal or financial implications arising directly from this report. But major changes in the structure and funding of ATBs and local tourist information outlets could have significant implications for the Council.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- a) agree that the ATB should be informed that the Council will expect the development of a format for local tourist information outlets and a promotional strategy as outlined in paras.3.8 and 4.3 above to be implemented over the

course of the next financial year, and that this commitment should be incorporated into the Service Level Agreement with the AATB;

- b) that the Council should adopt the principles set out in para. 5.2 above in responding to consultations on the future of the ATB network and national tourism strategy; and
- c) note that a further report will be submitted to the committee on the expected national consultation on the future of the ATBs and national tourism strategy.

Stephen Chorley
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SC/JO/MB/18/10/01

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 1. Final Draft Ayrshire & Arran Tourism Strategy 2001-4, AATB, 2001.**
- 2. 2000 Visitor Attraction Monitor – STB/Glasgow Caledonian University, 2001.**
- 3. A New Strategy for Scottish Tourism – Scottish Executive, 2000**

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AGENDA